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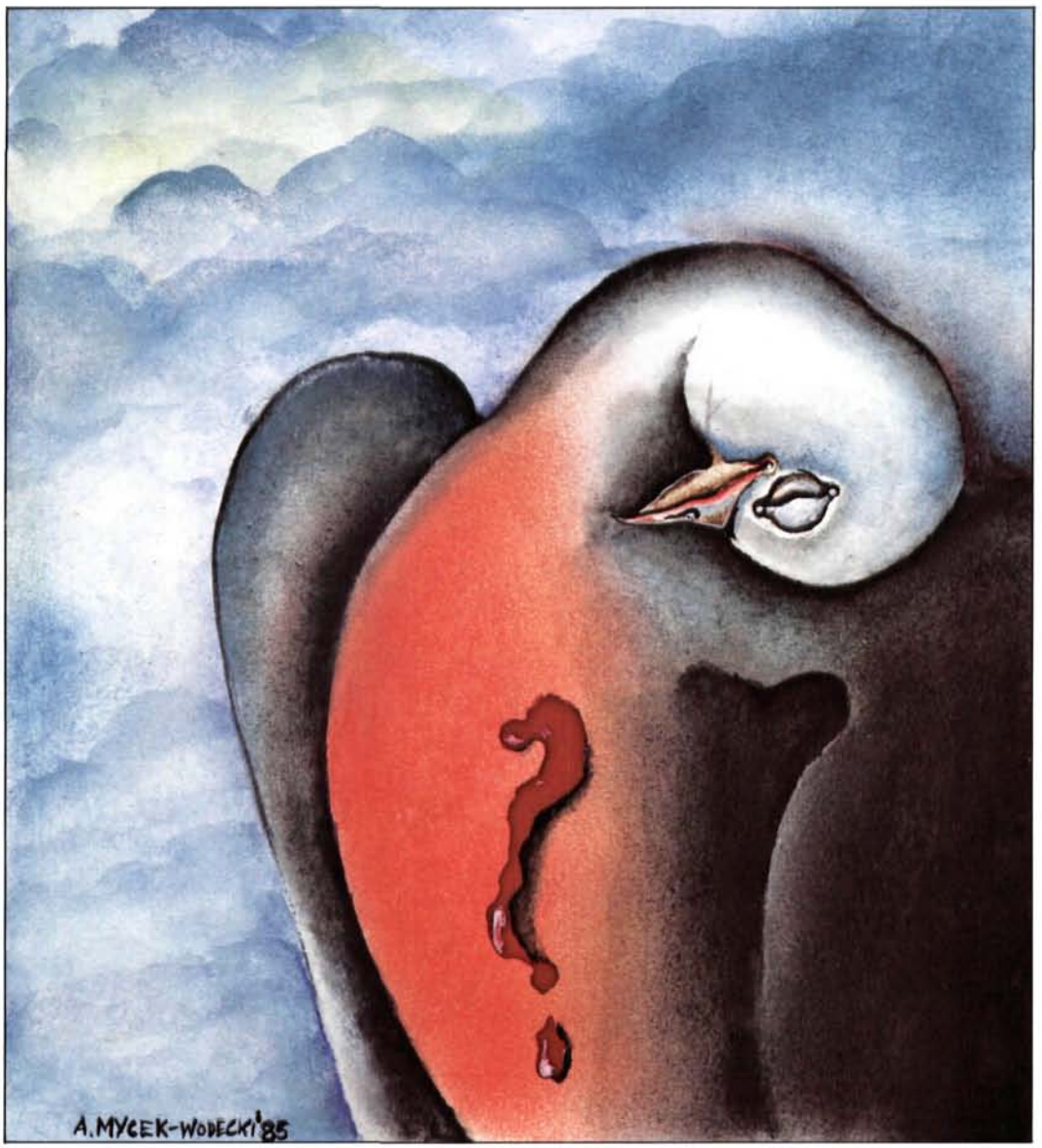

WHO KILLED COCK ROBIN?

...*The Crisis in the Arts*

FRED CHAPPELL • WILLIAM HAWKINS • JOHN LUKACS • ANDREI NAVROZOV

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**WHO KILLED COCK ROBIN?
. . . THE CRISIS IN THE ARTS**

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WAITING FOR THE END *by Thomas Fleming*

In the Gilbert and Sullivan series running currently on PBS, many American television viewers were treated for the first time to a performance of *Patience*, a masterful satire on the pretensions of aesthetes—the crowd George I described as "boets and bainters." When the heroine decides to humble herself by trying to love the high priest of culture, Mr. Bunthorne, the poet exclaims:

> Nature, for restraint too mighty far
> has burst the bonds of art—and here we are.

Here we are, indeed! The arts, we are told over and over, are dying, while nature—in the forms of science and liberated manners—is everywhere triumphant. The empire of the arts, once so vast and powerful, is now reduced to the narrow confines of museums and classrooms. The old Latin saw about *ars longa, vita brevis* (art is long, life is short) is now reversed, as gerontologists work to prolong life and important books are remaindered or even pulped almost before they reach the bookstores. Without the assistance of professional philanthropists, the arts would cease to exist.

It may be so. On the other hand, the American people are more devoted to art and various forms of aesthetic recreation than any nation in history. While other cultures have had to devote a large part of their energies to making a living, we are the consumers *par excellence* of drama, pictures, and contests of wit. The drama may be *Police Academy* or *Dynasty*; the pictures, photographs of Miss America in *Penthouse* or cheerful prints of starving Latin American children; while the contests of wit usually take place on *Jeopardy* and *Johnny Carson*. Much of it may be bad art—no, it *is* bad art, inexcusably bad—but art it is, nonetheless.

Then why is there all this outcry over the decline of art in America? If you can believe the various state and Federal agencies created to nurture the arts and humanities, it takes a massive investment of resources to enable the arts to maintain a beachhead on the hostile territory of the United States. Where do these people live? Americans must spend a large part of every day on essentially intellectual and aesthetic entertainment: watching TV or looking at magazines (although not reading them: reading *Time* for the news would be like buying *Playboy* for the interview). We are second only to the Greeks in our love of music—even the Greeks didn't have music in the elevator. As Aaron Copland used to complain, it is impossible to enter a bank without being subjected to Brahms. Today, he might add that you cannot walk down a quiet street without being assaulted by Twisted Sister or Tina Turner, the audio equivalent of mugging.

Obviously, what upsets the arts establishment is the fact that Culture Club is not performing Italian madrigals, and Mr. T is not reciting Shakespeare as he throws a pair of union racketeers through a plate-glass window. They also complain about the violence in movies and television shows, which means they have never seen *Titus Andronicus* or read the *Iliad*. They assure us that real poetry, as opposed to commercial jingles or Rod McKuen, has lost its audience. A survey done on college campuses a few years back revealed that hardly anybody could quote a line of contemporary verse—not even those who professed to admire it.

They must not have asked the right people. I am always running into people who can quote yards of poetry from the modern classics of Bob Dylan, Lennon and McCartney, and Dan Fogelberg—

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Just for a moment I was back at school
And felt that old familiar pain,
And as I turned to make my way back home
The snow turned into rain.

What makes Dan Fogelberg not a poet? There are several reasons. For one thing, his verses have rhyme and rhythm (strike one); for another, they make sense (strike two); and finally, they are addressed to the experiences of ordinary Americans (three strikes and you're out). There is an easy rule of thumb in these matters: art and poetry are either foreign or at least, like John Ashbery, unintelligible.

If there is a popular audience for music and poetry, you will not find them watching stale productions of Verdi on *Live at the Met* (PBS), where the camera zooms in so close that even Placido Domingo looks like a bloated frog. No, the true lovers of music and poetry are probably drinking beer in a stadium somewhere, watching Merle Haggard sing "I'll just sit here and drink" or his anti-utopian masterpiece, "Rainbow Stew"—

When a President walks through the White House door
And does what he says he'll do
We'll all be drinking that free bubble-up
And eating that rainbow stew.

It's not exactly Richard Strauss or even Thomas Campion. On the other hand, it's not Ned Rorem either—or whatever other prissy little composer of "art songs" happens to be *in* these days.

In a discussion of contemporary art, we have to eliminate the "classics" and stick to what is being written today—or at least in recent memory. A quick look at the scene is enough to convince almost anyone that we are headed for a sort of cultural showdown between the culture snobs, who are pushing the heirs of Arnold Schoenberg and Ezra Pound, and the culture slobs, who would rather see Hank Williams Jr. take off his shirt and sing "All my rowdy friends have settled down."

The snobs do have a point. There is a complexity, a solemnity, a spirituality about Bach and Milton that is largely absent from American popular culture. (But where do we find it in high culture?) Even granting a certain cleverness—or even artfulness—to songwriters like Bob Dylan, Lou Reed, and Bocephus, their compositions are not characteristic of the commercial trash usually played on the radio. Besides, at their best, popular songs rarely rise above the level of a folk art: they are more on the level of crewelwork than painting or sculpture.

All that is true. But note the distinction that is usually made between "authentic" songwriters like Hank Williams (Sr.) or Bob Dylan and the commercial hacks who grind out songs for the record companies. A genuine artist, at least in the popular sphere, is someone who comes out of a certain community, a certain tradition. Dylan consciously set out to make himself the heir of Woody Guthrie, Cisco Houston, and a folk musician as inauthentic as himself, Rambling Jack Elliot. Although that doesn't make Dylan "the real thing"—any more than Woody Guthrie, a middle-class DJ, was the real thing—it does show that his heart's in the right place. If popular artists, to be authentic, are expected somehow to represent a community or a tradition, why not serious artists?

In fact, the reverse is true. What we actually observe is the tyranny of highbrow artists who have one hand in the taxpayers' pocket, while the other hand is holding a knife ready to stick it in their backs. For some time now artists (I use the word in its generic sense) have exulted in their isolation and alienation from everything the rest of us perceive as normal, wholesome, or American. The best of them, like Henry James and T. S. Eliot, abandoned their country to become artificial Englishmen. More typical was Ezra Pound, who ended up in Italy defending the "real" America against the false version that happened to be engaged in a war against his adopted country.

Pound had his merits and in his own way loved his country, but his spiritual descendants do not even have the grace to leave. At the same time they are insulting us, almost in the same breath they tell us it is our duty to support them "for our own good." As Patience explained to the poet, "No, Mr. Bunthorne, you're wrong again." The State Department does a good enough job of subsidizing the enemies of America abroad; we don't need the National Endowments and state arts councils to do the same thing at home.

There is no reason to be surprised at the attitude of artists. It is symptomatic of a widespread refusal to accept the consequences of our behavior. Did you break the law, desert the army, flee the draft, and go to Canada? Well, your motives were pure: come home, all is forgiven. For some reason, though, it works with criminals; it doesn't with artists. Perhaps it is because we dimly realize that true art, including the greatest masterpieces, nearly always emerges from communities. Despite all the romantic myths, it is almost never the product of an isolated genius in rebellion against his people. The *Iliad* and *Odyssey*—like the great English and Scottish ballads—grew out of a folk tradition; and Shakespeare, who for all his faults is the best we have in English, turned his back on the alien pseudo-classicism of the university wits (even then the colleges were destroying literary talent) and reached out to the ordinary Englishmen of his time. In more recent times more than one major writer has felt compelled to return to his roots in rural society—Thomas Hardy no less than William Faulkner.

But it is not just rural societies that have community identity. The great urban civilizations of Athens, Rome, and the Italian city-states of the Renaissance were provincial cultures in the sense that they were self-centered and xenophobic, doggedly anticosmopolitan. Of course they were international to some extent. They had to be. The Italians leaned heavily upon Latin (and French) literary traditions, the Romans upon the Greeks. But the greatest Roman writers—Livy, Juvenal, and especially Vergil—were thoroughly Roman and devoted their talents to celebrating "the long glories of majestic Rome." When they criticized, it was from the inside, as a participating member of society.

Cosmopolitanism is the death of serious art. When English dramatists learned to turn their backs on Shakespeare and Jonson and to run after Racine and Molière, it

(continued on page 20)

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American Idol *by Fred Chappell*

"Eldorado banal de tous les vieux garçons."
—Charles Baudelaire

Russell Banks: *Continental Drift*; Harper & Row; New York.

The last sentence in Russell Banks's magnificent novel is surprising in its inevitability: "Go, my book, and help destroy the world as it is." Here is a sentence to conclude a politically radical novel, a story of socially revolutionary purpose. But there is no hint in *Continental Drift* about the personal politics of its author; the imperatives of this book are not political but ethical.

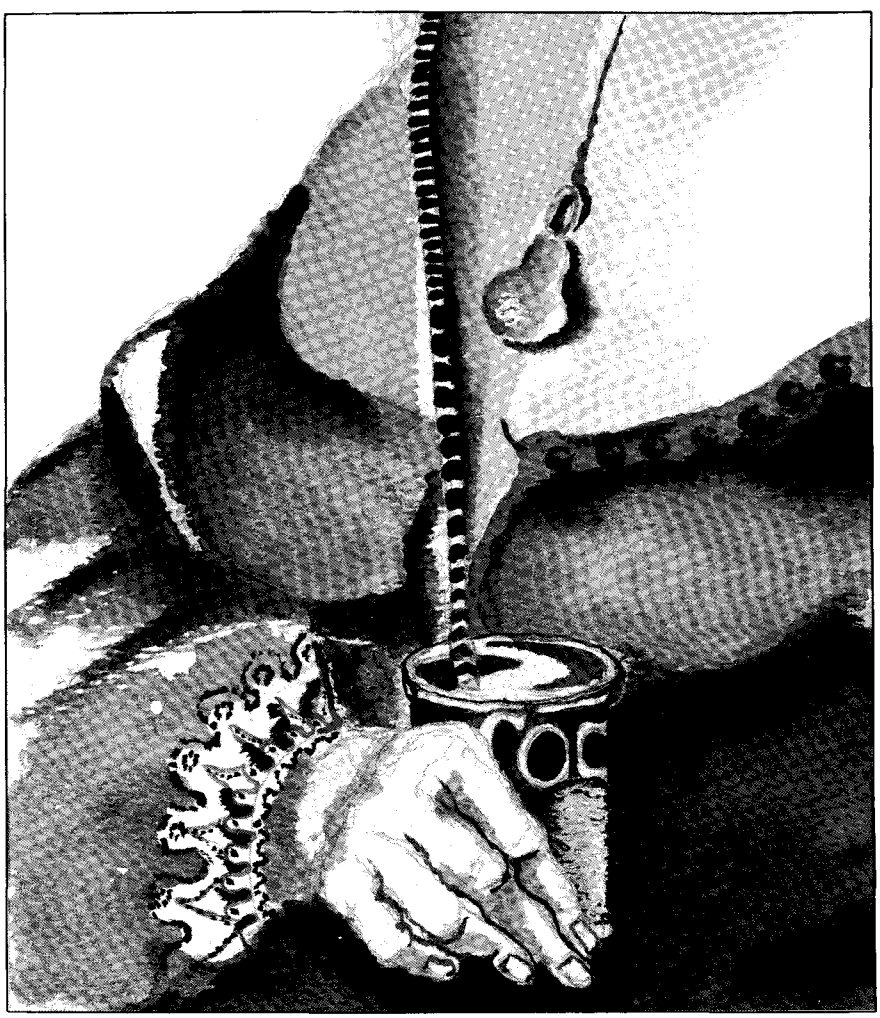
This final sentence actually points up the highly traditional nature of Banks's novel. It is such a novel as a contemporary Joseph Conrad might write, or a Dreiser or a Dickens. It is a brilliantly detailed, minute but solid, observation of two individual destinies which inform and reflect the contrasting milieus in which they are lived. Banks's moral purposes are as evident and as heartfelt as Tolstoy's, his artistry not much less stunning.

Continental Drift is a story of independent but parallel odysseys which finally intersect with terrifying result. One protagonist is Robert Dubois, a 31-year-old oil-burner repairman who lives in New England. He is dissatisfied with his lot in much the same way that Dreiser's Clyde Griffiths was dissatisfied. He gives up his dull career and moves to Florida to take a job as a clerk in his brother's liquor store. But for Dubois Florida is not merely a place on the map; Florida represents freedom, opportunity, fresh beginnings, the fabled golden land of light.

Florida is for Dubois the same ineffable El Dorado that "America" is for Vanise Dorsinville. Vanise is a young Haitian mother determined to flee the cruelties and poverty of her island and to transport her baby and young male cousin to the gleaming shores of Miami. The vicissitudes she endures in trying to do so are nightmarish but believable.

That is a major point about *Continental Drift*; it is convincing. No one who has read Banks's brilliant *Trailerpark* will be surprised at his grasp of significant detail, his wide knowledge of the situations of ordinary life. His expertise about mortgages, liens, automobiles, jobs, wages, and so forth will equal that of any of the great masters of naturalism about their chosen subjects. But allegiance to literary naturalism is now insufficient to render a believable account of modern society.

The phantasmagoric contemporary world is too vivid, too towering, to be faithfully represented by accumulation of detail or by patiently plotted trage-



Fred Chappell is a novelist and co-winner of the 1985 Bollingen Poetry Prize. His most recent book is I Am One of You Forever *(LSU).*

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dy. Both these achievements are finely present in *Continental Drift*; they are, in fact, the backbone of the novel. But at bottom Banks's understanding of our situation is that of the surrealist, the allegorical fantasist. This is the kind of understanding a novelist needs in order *to take for granted* the impossible injustices, the impossible terrors, that characterize our present time on earth.

Banks's understanding is unsparing and generously given. As a novelist, he is truly wise and in *Continental Drift* has chosen an omniscient point of view which firmly accommodates his insights. Here, for example, is an introductory glimpse of Jimmy Grabow, a very minor character:

> He smiled often, talked rapidly and volubly and enjoyed touching people while he rattled away at them, enjoyed putting his hands on whomever he talked to, his arms around shoulders, his hands on cheeks, arms, chests, so that most people, when they left the shop, reached for their wallets, and finding them, wondered what Grabow had taken from them, for always, after talking with Grabow, one felt somehow he'd managed to take away something that wasn't rightfully his.

The kind of interpretation this passage exhibits is common in the novel, and it is observable even from this one sentence that Banks's commentary is not ironic in purpose; it intends straightforwardly to inform and illuminate. In fact, apart from that inherent in the plot, there is little irony in the book. Banks faces all his material —which is ripe for ironic treatment —head on. He even judges his characters: Vanise Dorsinville, whose story is grindingly sordid in some respects, is a heroic figure; Robert Dubois is a decent man who haplessly commits multiple murders.

In Aeschylus' phrase, Helen of Troy was "destroyer of men, destroyer of cities." In *Continental Drift*, it is the idea of Golden America which takes on this destructive power, leading the strong and hopeless, as well as the weak and wistful, to inexorable calamity. Yet the novel is not utterly anti-idealistic. Vanise Dorsinville is not entirely mistaken in her dream of freedom in the United States. Dubois is mistaken, partly about the nature of his native land, mostly about the nature of freedom itself. Freedom, Banks gives us to know, is not merely the opportunity to escape boredom and to ascend the ladder of upward mobility. It is a way of feeling and thinking so enormous, so pervasive, that we who live inside its easy atmosphere can rarely make out its character.

Simple enough to see that Dubois is deceived by a false idol, and one piece of irony that Banks does engage in is to contrast Dubois' deceived unreligious faith against the Haitian woman's steadfast ardent belief in *voudon* (what you and I call "voodoo"). So far as I know, only Jorge Amado has ever before treated this important religion seriously in literature, and Banks in doing so is surely attacking his audience's uninformed prejudices. Yet it is not enough to treat it seriously; it must also be comprehensible and convincing. Banks's knowledge in this matter seems as careful and detailed as his knowledge of the mores of Florida. The *voudon* scenes are crucial, and he has brought them off.

Continental Drift is a grand book, one of the very best novels of recent times. Banks has appealed to the sophisticated reader in such a way as to disarm his sophistication, and if there are any unsophisticated readers still at large upon the planet, they must be breathlessly absorbed by the book. For it is an absorbing novel; the anticipated intersection of destinies doesn't even begin to take place until page 283 of 366, but one never feels impatient or put upon. The suspense is unforced, but it is unremitting.

And that is one of the best satisfactions of *Continental Drift*, our unobtrusive awareness that the author always knows exactly what he is doing. There are few of even our best contemporary writers to whom we give this confidence. cc

In the forthcoming issue of *Chronicles of Culture:*

Marxism: A Dying God

"Some Westerners apparently reject any distinction between authoritarianism and totalitarianism, and it is hard to know what to say to them. At a minimum, they are stuck with the untenable position of refusing to allow that Solzhenitsyn is an antitotalitarian, despite the whole record of his life and works. They also must come to terms with the whole historical record of regimes which did not seek to control every aspect of a citizen's life—social, cultural, personal—which allowed freedoms of speech, thought, travel, occupation, academic pursuit, religious belief and practice. They are forced to say that all leaders not democratically elected are tyrants."

—from "Solzhenitsyn and Democracy" by Edward E. Ericson Jr.

ALSO

Paul Hollander lays bare the contradictions of Marxist theory and practice

Michael Warder reopens the case of Arkady Shevchenko

J. Enoch Powell explores the experience of ancient Christians

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Grand Designs *by John Lukacs*

"Liberty, the daughter of oppression, after having brought forth several fair children, as Riches, Arts, Learning, Trade, and many others, was at last delivered of her youngest daughter, called FACTION."
—Jonathan Swift

Richard H. Pells: *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age: American Intellectuals in the 1940s and 1950s*; Harper & Row; New York; $18.95.

There are many things wrong with this book, beginning with its title. The Liberal Mind is not what this book is about. (Nor were the 1940's and 1950's really a Conservative Age —but let this pass.) It is about the intellection of the New York left. Liberality of mind is a desirable condition —yes, also (and perhaps especially) for political conservatives. It is an overall desideratum and not a term properly applicable to the designation of specific conventicles of intellectuals. Professor Pells's book is about the closely circumscribed and often cramped and airless circle of the latter. There were all kinds of men and women among them, good and bad, but in the 1940's and 1950's their influence on the course of the Republic and on the life of its people was nonexistent. Pells argues that their ideas *were* important; that, as is the case with certain writers, thinkers, artists, etc., they were the antennae of the race; that their arguments were forerunners of what would happen later. "In effect, the intellectual skirmishes which took place between 1955 and 1960 were rehearsals for the full-dress battles that continued to convulse the nation long after the age of Stalin, Truman, and Eisenhower had given way to Vietnam, Watergate, and a renewed Cold War." Not at all: those intellectual skirmishes were drearily limited; they meant nothing.

Yes, Ideas Have Consequences (the title of Richard Weaver's early conservative book): but in different ways. Since 1960 an American meritocracy began to emerge, so that all kinds of Presidents became dependent, at least partly, on academics who had crawled and kicked and chewed their way to the top by means of publicity. Also, the significant event in American intellectual—or, rather, ideological —history in the 1950's was the emergence of what goes under the name of "conservatism." About this Pells writes nothing. Yet, say what you will, and, whatever their stylistic and intellectual merits, since 1955 the influence of *National Review* rose, while that of *Partisan Review* declined. I do not berate Professor Pells for not writing about Bill Buckley—after all, that was not his self-defined task—but there is not a word in this book about Weaver, Tate, Kirk, and Canon Bernard Iddings (not Daniel) Bell, of the early and perhaps neo-classical conservatives. Pells's book is about the world of New York intellectuals. Yet he should have heeded Orwell who once wrote that intellectuals live in a world of ideas and have little contact with reality.

He does not mention Edmund Wilson's *To the Finland Station* either, whereby hangs a tale—or, rather, this paragraph. For 30 years *To the Finland Station* was the biblical exegesis of American intellectuals for the understanding of Communism. Yet *To the Finland Station* was hopelessly—and I mean hopelessly—wrong. To understand the reality of the Soviet Union by stringing an ideological disquisition through the writings of Michelet, Hegel, Marx, Plekhanov, etc., is like writing a history of the French Revolution by discussing Diderot, Voltaire, Rousseau and ending up with Mirabeau.

Pells spends much time and enormous respect on the "seminal" books of Hannah Arendt, Richard Hofstadter, John Kenneth Galbraith. He does not see their enormous shortcomings, even now. These shortcomings were due to the fact—and it is a fact—that their authors were opportunistic and ephemeral. Their writings and their view of history *were* opportune, because they projected the past and the future from their view of the present, from what then *seemed* to be going on. Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* ("a towering figure," "the political masterpiece of the postwar era") was a typical example of that. Having—somewhat belatedly—recognized that Stalin's regime was totalitarian and anti-Semitic, resembling in part (but only in part) Hitler's, she sat down to write a book *circa* 1949 with three theses: first, that anti-Semitism is the inevitable ingredient of every totalitarian regime (not true: Robespierre? Lenin? Castro?); second, that a totalitarian regime inevitably becomes more and more totalitarian as time goes on (not true: was Khrushchev more totalitarian than Stalin?); third, that a popular revolt against a totalitarian regime is impossible. (Soon after the publication of her book came the East German and Polish and Hungarian revolts—with no effect on her reputation, of course.)

According to Pells, Hofstadter's *The Age of Reform* was another "masterpiece"; it "remains a classic indictment of American liberalism." Not at all: Hofstadter was a frightened American liberal professor. His book was his frightened reaction to McCarthyism, in which Hofstadter rightly recognized elements of American populism (something that had been recognized by Canon Bell, Peter Viereck, and even by this writer years before, but no matter). But Pells is quite wrong in writing that Hofstadter's book was an indictment of Populists *and* Progressives. No: *The Age of Reform* deals only with the former, not the latter—the difference between the two being that the Populists became national socialists, while the Progressives remained wedded to an American version of internationalism, that is, to a form of international socialism. Also, while some of the Populists became anti-intellectual, the Progressives were proponents of intellectualism in every way. Hofstadter, the author of *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*

John Lukacs is professor of history at Chestnut Hill College. His most recent book is Outgrowing Democracy: A History of the United States in the Twentieth Century *(Doubleday).*

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(which Pells does not mention) did not live to see the day when professional intellectuals such as Kissinger or Brzezinski or Mrs. Kirkpatrick were running in and out of the Oval Office to explain the world to Presidents of the Republic.

In *The Affluent Society* John Kenneth Galbraith, as Pells writes, "placed his greatest hopes" in the "further and rapid expansion of a New Class," whose expansion "would be . . . *the* major social goal" of America; and since the continuing development of this New Class depended on the quality of the nation's schools, a substantial "investment in education could replace the production of goods as the new and basic 'index of social progress' for the United States." Soon after the successful publication of *The Affluent Society* (1958), American education got all the investments it wanted, with results that are as dreadful as they are obvious. Some index. Some progress.

Professor Pells read all of the issues of *Partisan Review* and *Commentary*, and some of *Dissent*. There is little or nothing in his work about periodicals such as *The New Leader* or *The New Yorker* or *The Atlantic*—after all, these reflected as well as contributed to the intellectual climate of those decades. He spends little space on the idiocies of *The New Republic* before 1949 and on those of *The Nation* even later. His book is also full of factual errors. World War I "appears in retrospect a mere skirmish compared to World War II." Some skirmish! Picasso's *Guernica* is "the most famous painting of the 20th century"—which is like saying that Mao Tse-tung's *Little Red Book* is its most important revolutionary document. "The intellectual community marched to war in 1940 imbued with a desperate sense of solidarity and purpose." Not at all: many American intellectuals remained pacifists. (As Irving Kristol, rather stupidly and self-contentedly, wrote but a few years ago, "the war of the worlds in 1940"—his words—was fought by "young giants" between Alcoves 1 and 2 of the New York City College cafeteria, between Stalinists and Trotskyists, of which Kristol was one of the latter. I would have thought that in September 1940 the war of the world was fought by the Luftwaffe and the RAF in the skies over England: but that, too, is another story.) Pells writes of "pressure groups like the Moral Majority" in the 1950's when the Moral Majority did not exist. (What we have needed for a long time is a moral minority.) The New York intellectuals, disillusioned with Communism, "found themselves supplying the philosophical ammunition for the Cold War." Not at all: that was the self-appointed job of people such as John Foster Dulles. "Kennan seemed a classic example of the intellectual as insider. . . . He argued that Moscow's compulsion was to conquer the world." Kennan argued nothing of the sort; and in 1947 he was light-years removed from intellectuals. For the New York intellectuals "Western Europe . . . London, Amsterdam, Paris, Rome, Vienna, Copenhagen [why Copenhagen?], Berlin were their second homes—filled with neighborhoods, shops, people, and experiences they could visualize in minute and passionate detail regardless of how long it had been since they last visited." No: most New York intellectuals were neither interested nor very comfortable in Western Europe. Their origins were Eastern European: if there was one "European" country in whose culture they remained interested it was Russia. In 1956 the Eisenhower Administration "confessed its helplessness to intervene" in the Hungarian Revolution. Eisenhower confessed nothing; he merely explained the self-serving tactics of his Administration away.

According to Pells, the "years between 1947 and 1955 were fearsome," and the firing of Communistic professors was "a carnage." This kind of rhetorical exaggeration is an example of the often poor quality of his writing, which is also full of words such as "emblematic" and phrases such as "rites of passage." On occasion there appears a good irreverent phrase ("after listening to [Paul] Goodman on the subject of children, one longed for W. C. Fields") and an insightful remark ("Truman may well have triumphed [in 1948] because the electorate perceived him as the most *conservative* of the candidates"). He is properly respectful of Dwight MacDonald, a solitary figure, whom many of the New York intellectuals refused to take seriously. "If anything, he took politics too seriously in the sense that he cared what effect governments actually had on their citizens. . . . MacDonald was by nature an empiricist rather than an ideologue; he could not retrain his skepticism about grand designs, particularly when they wound up corrupting individuals, culture, and elementary standards of moral conduct." This is very true; I wish that Professor Pells would write more about MacDonald; but I am afraid that, unlike MacDonald, he is too much of an ideologue and not enough of an empiricist. cc

BOOKS IN BRIEF

A Vanished Present: The Memoirs of Alexander Pasternak; edited and translated by Ann Pasternak Slater; Wolff/Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; San Diego; $17.95. Boris's younger brother recreates the world of Tolstoy, Nicholas II, and Rachmaninoff.

The Phoenix Phenomenon by Fred Holden; Phoenix; Arvada, CO; $3.50. A daring plan—complete with charts, statistics, and graphs—for improving the quality of American life by reducing the size of our Federal government and debt.

On the Shoulders of Giants: A Shandean Postscript by Robert K. Merton; Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; San Diego; $14.95. Newton's famous aphorism traced to Fuller, traced to Ross, traced to Burton. . . . A delightful melding of scholarship and parody.

God, Country, and the Supreme Court by James K. Fitzpatrick; Regnery; Chicago; $18.95. A vigorous indictment of Supreme Court justices who seem to have read the Constitution even less than they permit schoolchildren to read Scripture.

Louisa May Alcott by Madeleine B. Stern; University of Oklahoma Press; Norman, OK. Reprint of a standard biography of a lady whose gentle fiction continues to enchant millions.

The Soft Machine: Cybernetic Fiction by David Porush; Methuen; New York. A look at "the metaphor of the machine" as found in the works of Barthelme, Pynchon, Vonnegut, *et al.* Even if mechanization does reduce life to "noise, static, [and] random phrases in which entropy is high," do we really need fiction that simply mirrors this chaos?

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Boredom, Sex, and Murder *by Robert F. Geary*

". . . knew every quirk within lust's labyrinth
and were professed critic in lechery."
—Ben Jonson

E. L. Doctorow: *Lives of the Poets: A Novella and Six Stories*; Random House; New York.

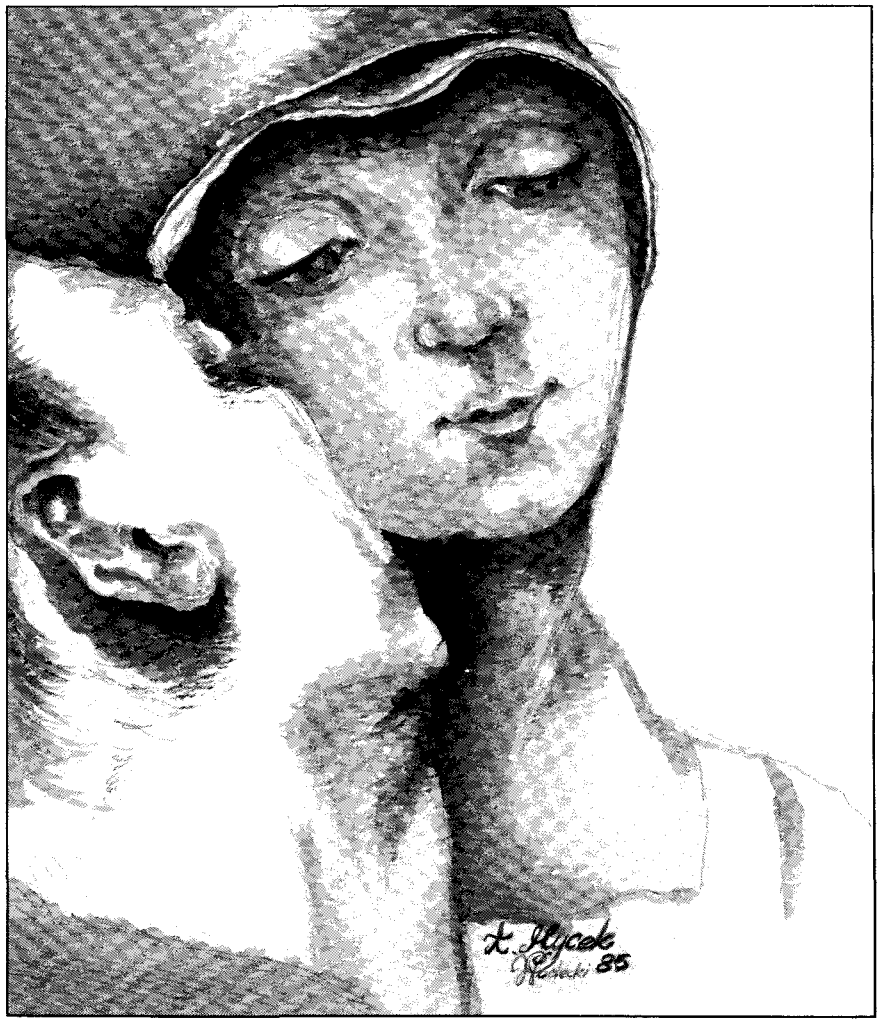
Norman Mailer: *Tough Guys Don't Dance*; Random House; New York.

Cracks are appearing in the idol of high culture fabricated by the Victorians. Matthew Arnold eloquently expressed the vision of the educated person who joins moral commitment with breadth of vision and transcends the narrowness of religion and the shallowness of pure aestheticism. This ideal of harmony, over time, hardened into a petty orthodoxy—antiphilistine gestures against the beliefs most people inherited. The educated liberal could feel assured that his enlightened positions and his seriousness about art as a surrogate religion (another, less happy, feature of Arnold's thought) both guaranteed his superiority over the benighted masses and would also find vindication in history.

Signs of wavering belief, however, have been appearing for some time now. New ideas are not fitting into the prescribed modes, making the correct ritualistic gestures hard to enact with grace. Even within the temples of art, questions arise about the civilizing value of learning and literature, as intellectual skepticism begins to devour its parents. Two recent novels, without exactly meaning to, show the cracks in the once complacent view of the world, as the void left by the repudiation of the past exacts its price on the makers of culture.

At a publication party for a New York writer (one of the "poets" of the collection's longish title story) a boozy author confronts Doctorow's narrator with a lugubrious question: "Tell me . . . is there a writer here who really believes in what he is doing? Do I? Do you?" For the narrator the awkward moment passes, but for the reader the question lingers after he finishes this blessedly short, banal, first-person glimpse into the mid-life crises overtaking the narrator and his literary friends. What depresses the reader is not the simple suspicion that *Lives of the Poets* represents a successful author's attempt to cash in on his name by putting out a handful of fairly opaque short stories and a semi-autobiographical reflective narrative at $15 for the batch. Pecuniary itches, like occasional bad books, are common enough even in good writers. What sinks the spirits is the lack of any serious vision, however askew or flawed, in the 60 pages of musings that constitute the book's final section. Even a hastily done book can tell much about an author: Doctorow's latest suggests narrative skill without any corresponding range of insight.

Even at best, the mid-life tribulations of Manhattan literati are a subject both insular and sad. Will the narrator return from self-imposed separation and rejoin his fastidious wife of 18 years in suburban comfort, abandoning the bohemian chic of the Village? Or will he take off with a cool, promiscuous Eng. Lit. prof half his years? Will he, after a lifetime of accomplishment, sink slowly into dereliction? The last possibility seems unlikely, given his testy self-possession and detachment. Neither of the first



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two alternatives invites our concern since neither the wife nor the female professor has much reality. The narrator, beneath his literary flourishes, does not seem to care deeply how things turn out: Why should we?

Yet such lives are not without poignancy, and the epidemic of collapsing marriages should generate some probing reflections. What we receive instead is a distillation of generations of professional psychological unwisdom as the narrator remarks that there are, of course, "the traditionally married, battling, shrieking, and occupying each other's brains like some terrible tumor until one of them dies." Never does it occur to Doctorow that by equating family with misery, he helps to foster the phenomenon of the book's numerous "half-married" characters, people, that is, drifting to divorce, foolish infatuations, and final loneliness. The coming undone of the lives of these people is not seen as linked in any way to their values; it is, instead, some unaccountable malady befalling the narrator's generation as if from the sky.

Nor does perception improve when the focus widens beyond the fraying lives of the writers. Now that the narrator rides the subway to and from his loft in the Village, his native New York for the first time looms as a strange and threatening place. (Presumably, he had loftily dismissed as fascist propaganda 20 years of rumors about crime and chaos.) Any sense of how such disintegration might have come about goes no further than comments which might appear in letters to *The Nation*—the zany idea that most of the crime stems from the new immigrants—Laotians, Vietnamese, Haitians, *et al.*, who "have come here because we have made their lands unlivable." It is an idea only an intellectual (with the visceral hostility to America that marks so many) could swallow! His remedy for the blight of subway graffiti, if equally brainless, at least possesses a kind of idiot charm: "Paint the subway cars in profusions of tropical colors" to satisfy "the longing of the soot-choked urban heart for the sun life of the tropics."

Admirers of Doctorow may seek to fob the book off on the public by saying that it mirrors a segment of life in our times—the insecure, self-preoccupied world of urban intellectuals where every subject is processed into cocktail party chatter. Lacking any norms beyond the pop psychology clichés of self-fulfillment, *Lives of the Poets* is, however, no satire, no examination. It is instead an instance of the malaise it reflects, a mirror only in the sense of having a carefully wrought surface without depth, a book as empty as the unquestioned promises of endless vistas of personal fulfillment that allure its pathetic characters. The spread of such a sensibility raises questions about the survival of more than just the novel as an art form.

Norman Mailer's *Tough Guys Don't Dance* is also a slim work, a compendium of the author's many metaphysical, social, and psychological ideas enfolded into a mystery-thriller plot. It is Mailer's 1964 *An American Dream* shortened so that the narrator cannot take the slightest action, it seems, without Mailer doing philosophical heavy breathing on such vintage themes as the violence lurking in the American psyche, the roots of cancer in existential funk, or the prevalence of occult forces of a Manichaean nature. The underdeveloped themes threaten time and again to swamp the story line, the primary focus in this subgenre. Jolts of lurid violence, however, do bring readers back to the plot each time Mailer's musings seem about to submerge his tale.

Writer Tim Madden (Mailer's fictional stand-in) awakens from a serious drunk on the 24th day after his wife's departure to find, first, a strange tattoo on his arm, second, blood covering the front seat of his car, and, a bit later, the severed head of a woman (his wife?) in a woodland hiding place where he stashes his marijuana harvest. With little recollection of the previous evening's fun, Madden must suspect his own considerable violence as well as the violence in nearly every other character in the off-season Provincetown community. Well he might, for it is a given of Mailer's world view that America is a murderous place, with ample justification for what otherwise would be paranoia. Whether it be the local lawman, a Viet vet with the look of "one Christian athlete who hated to lose," a good-old-boy type named Spider Nissen, or a homosexual millionaire—each has the savagery to kill. Moreover, given the adulterous sexual gymnastics in which all engage, any one of the characters may have a motive, especially since nearly everyone in town seems to have some link, usually sexual, to the unsavory past of Madden or his apparently dead wife.

Unlike Doctorow's collection, *Tough Guys Don't Dance* manages to sustain the reader's interest. The conventions of the thriller help make the violence acceptable. The coincidences, in turn, take place in a context of existential risk which Mailer labors to create. If he sees demonic forces—psychic, political, even supernatural—lurking everywhere, Mailer at least does not pretend that Asian refugees are the true sources of terror in America. In *Tough Guys* he is an aspiring heavyweight in a lightweight class of fiction, giving a performance which, if incongruous, is not entirely insipid. Indeed, his return to a traditional form of fiction comes as a relief after his ventures in quasi-journalism, semi-fictional biography, and the bloated historical potboiler. The last decade's recession from the apocalyptic mode of utterance may make his overwrought vision less compelling, but he is not boring or merely artsy. There is no need for any of his characters to whine about the death of the novel.

"Better than any fiction I know, 'Lives of the Poets' illuminates the sources from which fiction springs."

Newsweek

A curious symmetry exists, however, between Doctorow's and Mailer's slender books. In both, the characters suffer from the attenuation of healthy ties to families, communities, and to larger, rooted systems of meaning which would fill the vacuum in their lives. Both writers work from the axiom that the traditional sources of meaning simply have ceased to work for modern people (an assumption which, if repeated often enough by influential enough people, has a self-fulfilling character). This modern dogma propels the lives of millions and pushes the two authors' characters in different directions. Doctorow's poets wallow in narcissism—whether in hot tubs, chic oriental monasteries, or, typically, in fleeting affairs. The

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result in fiction is more tiresome than even pathetic. Mailer's figures live in a high-voltage world of internal and external violence. His protagonists stand ready at any moment to confront the existential challenges which will secure or compromise their manhood, bring them closer to psychic salvation or to the onset of cancer. As a result, *Tough Guys* does not tire the reader.

Yet emptiness is what haunts the works of both writers, though the responses of their characters differ widely —languishing and casual sexual indulgence as opposed to aggression and sexual orgies. Both sets of characters were spawned in a void once filled by meaningful, inherited norms. Mailer endeavors to generate a demonized world of self-created significance so as to avoid the abyss into which Doctorow's writers are gently sinking, having lost their assurance that art and progressive attitudes will substitute for older verities. Indeed, Mailer's Tim Madden might be thought of as the secret dream of Doctorow's fuddled intellectuals who moan about the insignificance of their precious works: Madden's violence and, especially, his sense of inhabiting a cosmos charged with significance, however dreadful, is what they vainly seek on more prosaic and trendy levels. Unfortunately, Mailer's fascinating world is the projection of his own intensities. Its significances, like those of a paranoid's vision, are not accessible to outsiders. It can entertain but cannot help those who are drifting in cultural disarray. Art alone does not, after all, save, as Doctorow's tipsy poet has come to suspect. cc

REVISIONS

One Loaded Chamber

Graham Greene appears to have missed his appointment with destiny. In the 1940's and 1950's, Greene was well on his way to becoming modern England's greatest novelist. By turning his back on the *arcana* of experimental fiction, he had won a popular following; probing dilemmas of faith and principle with subtlety and skill, he had won critical acclaim. Yet something went awry. In the new critical study *Graham Greene* (Frederick Ungar; New York; $13.95), Richard Kelly observes that Greene's last novel, *Monsieur Quixote* (1982), is "a surprising capstone to his literary career" because it "turns away from the deadly earnest treatment of his Catholicism and such obsessive subjects as pity, failure, suicide, and sex" found in earlier books. "Surprising" is too kind. *Monsieur Quixote* is no more than a comic farce blithely equating the Catholicism of a bumbling and childish priest and the Marxism of a worldly-wise Spanish mayor. It is no wonder that despite his political correctness, Greene was passed over by the Nobel Committee the last time they looked toward England.

Though Kelly has high praise for Greene as "one of the best novelists of the twentieth century" and only intermittently alludes to weaknesses in his later work, he does provide sufficient clues for the attentive reader. Kelly finds a key to much of Greene's life in an incident in the fall of 1923, when, "in a confused state of intolerable boredom and sexual frustration," the young author slipped a single bullet into his brother's revolver, twirled the chamber, pointed the barrel at his head, and pulled the trigger. Greene found the experience rejuvenating: "I remember an extraordinary sense of jubilation, as if carnival lights had been switched on in a drab street. . . . It was like a young man's first successful experience of sex."

We might suppose that Greene left this kind of perilous self-stimulation behind when he joined the Catholic Church in 1926. Catholicism is undeniably central to Greene's best books—*The Power and the Glory* (1940) and *The Heart of the Matter* (1948). But by the early 1960's, Greene was protesting his identification as "a Catholic writer" and was writing transparently autobiographic fiction (*The Burn-Out Case*, "A Visit to Morin") about characters who have grown "weary of success, Catholicism, and sex." Looking back, it was a bad sign that Greene—who took the name of the doubter Thomas as his baptismal name—was so fascinated with *failed* clerics who drink heavily, father illegitimate children, and brood endlessly on their corruption. There are no Thomas Mores—not even any Father Browns—in Greene.

Quite possibly, Greene picked up his religion for the same reason he picked up his brother's revolver: pointed at the head and revolved a bit, the promise of salvation and the threat of damnation do prompt a remarkable rush of adrenaline. Kelly puts it delicately: "Greene enjoys pressing Catholic teachings to extraordinary limits in order to make the lives of his characters more intensely exciting." Since the early 1960's, though, "the novelty and shock of his whisky priest have passed," and Kelly believes Greene's Catholicism is no longer "a powerful distraction to literary critics."

What has stirred Greene's blood since the mid-50's has usually been not religion but politics. In such works as *The Quiet American* (1955) and *The Comedians* (1966), Greene has descended into anti-American caricature and Third World romanticism. Generally a sympathetic reader, even Kelly admits that in Greene's later work, ideology "imposes a rigidity" that weakens his work and gives us "figures in a Marxist fantasy." Greene's political enthusiasms prompted him to declare in 1967 that if forced to choose between living in the Soviet Union and the U.S., "I would certainly choose the Soviet Union."

After some of his recent productions, we shall not be sorry to see him go. cc

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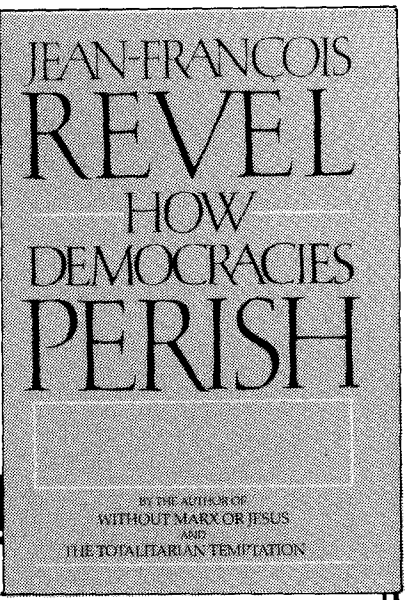
This is the book Jeane Kirkpatrick quoted in her stirring address to the Republican convention



Do you remember her words? "The American people know that it is dangerous to blame ourselves for terrible problems we didn't cause. They understand, just as the distinguished French writer, Jean-Francois Revel, understands the danger of endless self-criticism and self-denigration. He wrote: 'Clearly, a civilization that feels guilty for everything it is and does will lack the energy and conviction to defend itself.' "

That, briefly, is the kernel of this classic study of Western malaise. The Kremlin is playing the liberal West like a fiddle. Revel expands his analysis with several key points:

- ☐ Liberal democracies are *by nature* flabby. If liberal intellectuals hesitate to admit this — well, the Communists are in no hurry to embarrass them.
- ☐ Soviet disinformation *seeks out* the soft spots in our liberals. And finds them, all the time.
- ☐ Revel analyzes the soft spots, shows *how* the Soviets zero in on them.
- ☐ How the Communists plot — yes, *plot* — for world domination. Why they've been winning ever since Yalta.
- ☐ Case histories: how the left-liberals paved the way for these Red victories.
- ☐ Liberal foreign policy: the intellectual roots.

But shouldn't we take comfort from the internal problems of the Soviets? Revel calls this an illusion. *One* of us, he points out, will collapse first. But we fail to exploit Communist weaknesses. They not only exploit ours, they *cause* some of them.

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Economist in the Pulpit *by William R. Hawkins*

"Dosn't thou 'ear my 'erses legs,
as they canters awaay
Proputty, proputty, proputty—
that's what I 'ears 'em saay."

—Alfred Tennyson

George Stigler: *The Intellectual and the Marketplace*; Harvard University Press; Cambridge, MA.

George Stigler: *The Economist as Preacher and Other Essays*; University of Chicago Press; Chicago.

George Stigler won the Nobel Prize for Economics in 1982, the second member of the Chicago School to win that award in less than a decade (the other being Milton Friedman in 1976). These prizes are highly visible evidence of the renewed respectability of neoclassical, free-market economics following the failures of central planning, regulation, redistribution, and Keynesian fiscal theory. Both Chicago winners are great communicators and gifted essayists. The central concern of these two collections of essays is the state of economics as a scholarly profession. While this may strike many as a concern guaranteed to ratify Carlyle's description of economics as a "dismal science," nothing could be farther from the truth. Stigler's wit and style are as abundant as his knowledge.

The Intellectual and the Marketplace contains 18 essays constructed, as Stigler states in the preface, to "employ the weapon of mirth." The essays are primarily directed at economics as practiced in academe. Whether it is the teaching of economics or economics as an academic career, there is certainly no lack of targets for satire in the Ivory Tower.

"The Conference Handbook" lists all-purpose introductory remarks and comments to be used when encountering the research of others. Stigler suggests that to save time, the clichés be standardized and referred to by number. Alternating #4, "Theorizing is not fruitful at this stage, we need a series of case studies" with #5, "Case studies are a clue, but no real progress can be made until a model of the process is constructed" would cover most situations, though the purist can simply dismiss matters with #1, "Adam Smith said that." Unfortunately, too many people rely on a half-dozen references to arcane statistical methodologies to sound learned while rendering discussion sterile.

Stigler's humor is merciless, whether the subject is "Stigler's First Law of Sympathy" by which a casual attempt is made to quantify the intangible or "How to Pass Examinations in Economics" where true-false questions become worse than 50-50 propositions the more one thinks about them or "The High Cost of Model Changes" where he applies the Galbraithian criticism of the auto industry to publishing: he proposes that to lower costs to the public, only material written before 1900 be printed (reprinted) in sturdy bindings capable of enduring for generations. After all, he concludes, "most new knowledge is false; and the news got around in Athens."

Not all the points behind the wry comments are critical. In "Meager Means and Noble Ends" he argues that since the basic economic assumption of scarcity applies to the supply of first-rate scholars, it is impossible for any university to excel in every field. Universities must specialize in a few areas and settle for adequacy in the rest. Students who want access to a wider variety of scholarship than any single school can offer should have greater freedom to combine programs from different colleges in pursuit of a degree.

The question of specialization figures in other essays. He is quite critical of the "encyclopedic texts" used in elementary economics courses. In two semesters everything from oligopoly theory to economic development, labor unions to fiscal policy, is thrown at students who have no prior background in the field. The result is usually confusion with too little time spent on any topic to gain an understanding of it. As anyone who has taught such courses knows, students respond to this barrage by memorizing enough material to get through each exam, then promptly forgetting it when the topic changes. Instead of giving students a sample of different areas, Stigler would concentrate on price theory (what real-world economists use 99 percent of the time): competition and monopoly, consumer choice and wage theory uncomplicated even by digressions into oligopoly or elasticity. The goal is for students to understand the logic of economic activity through repeated application of basic principles to a variety of cases.

The 18 essays in *The Economist as Preacher* are more serious in tone and display Stigler's depth of scholarship in the history of economic ideas. In the title essay, he states that "the main task of economics has always been to explain real economic phenomena in general terms." This invariably means dealing with public policy.

> In talking to a non-economist, there is hardly anything in economics except policy for the economist to talk about. The layman is unequipped to discuss with an economist the problems that concern professional economists at any time. . . . The typical article in a professional journal is unrelated to public policy—and often apparently unrelated to this world.

In explaining economic phenomena, it is assumed that individuals will attempt to maximize their utility given the opportunities and constraints before them. Economists should only deal with "social policy and institutions, not individual behavior" to determine how changes in policy and institutional arrangements affect the aggregate result of individual actions. Economists are merely efficiency ex-

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perts, "political arithmeticians." Others can argue what *should* be done; economists will advise how to do it with the least cost in resources. Stigler is proud that economists in general do very little "preaching."

This theme of positive economics is pursued in many of the essays. An important factor Stigler feels is often overlooked is the role of politics. Economic policy cannot be fruitfully debated in a vacuum. Economists who do so find that they have little influence on events. In theory, "we live in a world full of mistaken policies, but they are not mistaken for their supporters." He rejects the notion that people will long support policies which produce effects opposite to what they want. Interest groups need economists to explain alternative results so that they can determine which policies to support.

Stigler is a loyal "friend of Adam Smith" but points out in three essays that Smith had a blind spot on politics. "Smith gave a larger role to emotion, prejudice and ignorance in political life than he ever allowed in ordinary economic affairs." Smith blamed mercantilism on "national jealousy and animosity" defining power politics merely as emotions. Smith, of course, did not completely overlook politics. Stigler lists more than two dozen instances where Smith links legislation to particular interest groups. Smith was a harsh critic of the merchants and industrialists whom he thought controlled Parliament. However, Stigler believes that Smith did not fully adopt the view that "the procuring of favorable legislation *is* a commercial undertaking."

The classical economists of the 19th century, despite their reputation for *laissez faire*, were not opposed to all government intervention in the economy. Smith supported the Navigation Acts and usury laws. J. S. Mill supported public education and called for limits on hours of work for children. Alfred Marshall endorsed public housing. Stigler concludes that "the same economist could and did repel the state with one hand and beckon it with the other." To understand this, one first has to reject classical economic theory as an ideology. It is a tool, a means, not an end. An economist supports or opposes a particular policy on the basis of whether he believes it will produce a desired result.

Thus when Nassau Senior and Robert Torrens opposed limits on hours of work for women, it was not on grounds of natural rights, but because they thought such limits would reduce family income, raise production costs, and generate unemployment if British industry became less competitive in foreign trade. Stigler quotes Smith's acknowledgment that certain regulations which he endorsed were violations of natural liberty, but that the benefits to the community outweighed this cost. However, such choices can only be ratified by empirical analysis. Stigler is concerned because public policy is not often subjected to such analysis. Debates are based on opinions and intentions, not evidence.

Stigler does not have a high opinion of those schools of thought which are based on ideology rather than performance. Marxism is an obvious example, and Stigler cites praise for the policies of Joseph Stalin found in the works by Ronald Meek and Oskar Lange to illustrate the absurd lengths to which ideological partisanship can go under the guise of economics. He also criticizes the Austrian school on the other end of the ideological spectrum.

> The Austrian school could survive into the twentieth century only because its main bonds were opposition to historical and empirical research and loyalty to economic liberalism—the early agreement of its members on value theory did not persist, nor extend to capital theory or monetary theory.

Stigler spends a considerable amount of time on the history of economic thought and its role in the education of economists, yet he says little about the study of economic history. Virtually every economics department has courses in economic thought for its majors, but many neglect economic history. Economic history is the study of how economic

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systems have operated under a variety of conditions. It is the record of experience and the only real laboratory available. However, it often falls through the crack between two disciplines. Economics and business majors consider history to be boring and historians do not have sufficient economic training to feel comfortable with it. But does this not also reveal a preference for theory over practice among academic economists?

Do economic theories have much influence? In themselves, Stigler doubts it. Only if economic conditions or the political environment are able to create a demand for a theory will it prosper. There is a market for ideas to which scholars respond.

> Ideas without demands are simply as hard to sell as other products without demands. If anyone . . . wishes to become an apostle of the single tax after the scripture of Henry George, for example, I recommend that he or she acquire and cherish a wealthy, indulgent spouse.

A wealthy spouse or patron may enable a scholar to pursue any idea (as Engel's fortune sustained Marx), but if there are not wider communities of interest who believe that the policy implications of the idea will benefit them, it will be impossible to convince them to adopt it purely on its intellectual merits. One reason Stigler suggests for the popularity of central planning and regulation among academic economists is the role of government as both a patron and consumer of such ideas.

Keynes responded to the Great Depression with a theory which served to justify the kinds of policies most governments were already using to combat mass unemployment. The Corn Laws were not repealed in 1846 merely on the strength of Richard Cobden's oratory (which had been resisted for quite some time) but because it was becoming apparent that England's farms were incapable of feeding the nation. Free trade triumphed on the issue of food imports out of necessity but has yet to win universal approval because it is still based more on theory than careful empirical work. Its opponents can more easily produce data on plant closings, trade deficits, and unemployment to rally the public.

It is impossible to give more than a sample of the topics covered by the three-dozen essays in the two Stigler collections. Thought-provoking is the best description as Stigler discusses the uses of scientific biography, the obsession with equality, the theories of Richard Kuhn and Thomas Merton on the progress of knowledge, or the debate between the friends and enemies of the competitive economy. He even manages to make essays on the kinked oligopoly demand curve and on marginal utility theory interesting, an effort alone worthy of a Nobel Prize.

His adherence to the essential correctness of the free-market economy never wanes, nor does his wit.

> Producers make profits by discovering more precisely what consumers want and producing it more cheaply. Some may entertain a tinge of doubt about this proposition, thanks to the energy and skill of Professor Galbraith, but even his large talents hardly raise a faint thought that I live in a house rather than a tent because of the comparative advertising outlays of the two industries.

By the same token, readers should of self-interest choose Stigler's bo over those of the competition. T are the superior output of a very p ductive mind.

REVISIONS

Tales Out of School

Storytelling is the oldest of human arts—long before we were decorating caves with animated paintings of game, we were swapping lies about the buffalo that got away. If our fugitive experiences ever seem to make any sense, it is only when we have caught them for a moment in a story. Aristotle knew that the key to serious literature was the plot, the *logos*—a word that in a different context is used to explain the creation and redemption of mankind; and while "in the beginning was the story" may not be the best translation of John's gospel, it does illuminate the second person of the Trinity in one important aspect: creative intelligence.

Most poets and novelists knew all this until very recently. (Even Dylan Thomas thought every poem should be dramatic.) The greatest of modern novelists have been above all narrators: Proust, Faulkner, and Conrad. So is Fred Chappell. It is not that Chappell's latest book, *I Am One of You Forever* (Louisiana State University Press; Baton Rouge) resembles either *À la Recherche de Temps Perdu* or *Nostromo* in any material way (although there are affinities with Faulkner's *The Unvanquished*), but this novel, told in a series of tales, is a minor masterpiece of the narrative art.

The various stories, which center around a family in western North Carolina, are lively, often very funny, and are imbued with a sense of the tragic so offhand and so understated that a reader might wonder if he is reading more into the book than the author intended. Chappell never condescends to us, never moralizes, and—thank goodness—almost never explains. The descriptive passages, worthy of so good a poet, are never overdone: they give just a sniff of the mountains without pretending to convey every last wearying mouthful of meat-and-potatoes description.

To say more would be an embarrassment to one of our contributors. To let such a book go unmentioned would be a critical injustice. cc

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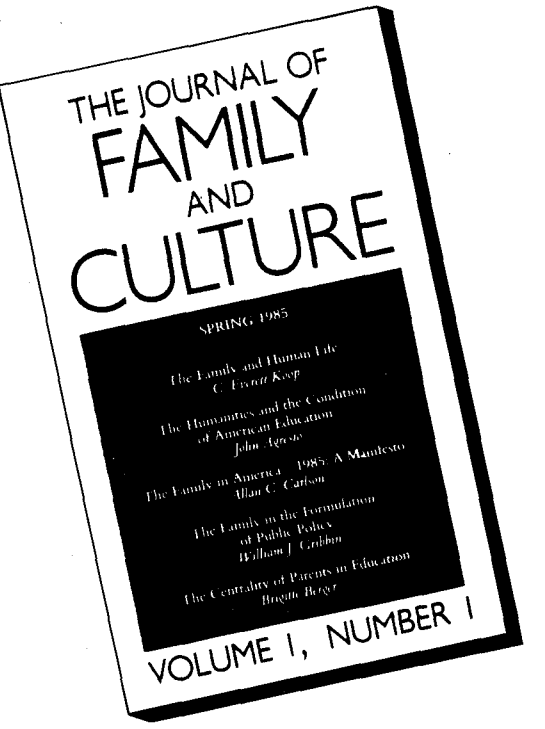

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BIANCA AND THE COMMISSAR *by Andrei Navrozov*

I was reading at the Periodicals Room of Yale's Sterling Memorial Library the other day. The magazine I happened to pick up was called *Soviet Literature*, subtitled "A Monthly Journal of the Writers' Union of the U.S.S.R. published in English, French, German, Spanish, Hungarian, Polish, Czech, and Slovak." The issue, for March 1985, "marked the occasion," as its editors put it, "of the 8th of March, the International Women's Day," and contained poems inspired by that famous holiday. I share with you several lines from the first poem:

Youth—a concept which I believe
Actual years do not really explain.
If you seek no idle repose and rest
Then your youth you still surely retain.

If you still believe that you can
Climb up any mountain crest
You are surely twenty years less
Than your document may profess.

It goes on like that for a bit.

Next to *Soviet Literature*, alphabetically, lay the current issue of the quarterly *Southern Review*, published by Louisiana State University (mercifully, I should say, in only one language, English, and with a net press run of only 2,968 copies). It, too, contained poetry by and about women. I'll share several lines from the first poem:

Here on the prison lawns, a veil
of sunlight weights the grass.

I walk here, while my brother
is visiting the warden who is his friend.

I am never to understand why my brother
wants to bring his troupe of actors,

The mesmerist who leads them into
the lives of fictions, and leaves them there.

This goes on for six pages.

The experience of trying to decide which of the two "randomly" chosen poems, the Soviet or the American, is actually *more* terrible, and why, has animated what I have to say on the subject of moral—or cultural—equivalence.

I'll begin with a passage from a biography of Benjamin West, the 18th-century American painter:

> "But what do you intend to be, Benjamin?" West answered that he had not thought at all on the subject, but that he should like to be a painter. "A painter!" exclaimed the boy, "what sort of a trade is a painter? I never heard of such a thing." "A painter," said West, "is a companion for kings and emperors." "Surely you are mad," replied the boy, "for there are no such people in America."

It may seem to some of us, particularly in moments of despair, that if American culture had a tomb, the above passage from John Galt's *Life and Studies of Benjamin West* would doubtless make a suitable epitaph. We despair, of course, not because little Benjamin grew up to be a

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Andrei Navrozov, who emigrated from Russia in 1972, is editor of The Yale Literary Magazine *and a contributing editor of* Harper's.

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companion of George III, while the best the artists *we* know can hope for is to share a beach house with Bianca Jagger; rather, we feel that somewhere along the road to liberty, fraternity, and equality, more than decorous titles were left by the dusty and flowerless wayside.

A personal antidote to such feeling is the recollection that Soviet guides conducting tours of the Tolstoy estate at Yasnaya Polyana, near Tula, explain to visitors that while in the old days there was but one writer—Count Lev Tolstoy—today there are hundreds of writers in the Tula region. The recollection acts as an antidote because it reminds one that the political opposites of a free society are not only lacking in its blessings, but have all of its shortcomings in a monstrously magnified form. In other words, the Soviet equivalent of George III, speaking symbolically, is also a Bianca Jagger, except that there she probably heads the Ministry of Culture and holds the rank of Colonel in the state security apparatus. Likewise, if for Tolstoy style was a private, or personal, matter, for every one of his Tula region brethren today the least stylistic frivolity may put an unambiguous end to the privileges of electricity and hot water.

I hasten to point to my swift recovery from the nostalgia induced by the West anecdote because I fear that my reading of American culture may be confounded with the grumbling that is the hallmark of critics of democracy on both the "left" and the "right," from California's Herbert Marcuse to Vermont's Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. In particular, Solzhenitsyn's God-of-our-fathers brand of cultural criticism seems to have put our enlightened intelligentsia on the defensive. "Our Will Endures," Archibald MacLeish proclaimed in a hurried rebuttal of the Harvard speech.

Of course, all that fuss was not about our will or any other rhetorical appurtenances of contemporary Spengleriana. The scourge of Harvard had made some rather opaque pronouncements in that famous high-pitched voice of his; but indistinct and ante-Tocquevillian though these were, they made the larger audience realize, for the first time in modern American history it seems, that there existed the Problems of Culture; and that, unlike any of the problems with which the audience was familiar, this one simply did not have a political solution.

Theoretically, cultural life under the conditions of economic and political freedom should have a lushness, and a splendor, beyond a poet laureate's most sycophantic, or egotistical, dreams. Sure there is neither court nor academy; sure there is no *one* "sacred canopy"; sure there is only an empty shrine. But there are *myriad* enclaves, each with a separate system of values, each with a poet, a king, and perhaps a god of its own choosing, all joined together in a paean to liberty. "Theoretically" is the key word here.

Instead, in reality, a well-dressed man named Leo Castelli is quoted, in an issue of a magazine on the cover of which he appears, as saying, "I read Freud," adding by way of explanation: "I wanted to be a Renaissance man." Instead, we get "poetry by and about women."

Conversely, the cultural climate of a nation whose writers may get their hot water shut off because of a disagreement over syntax must indeed be chilling. And yet, the sense that the poem you are reading in manuscript may be the poet's last creates a remarkable subterranean atmosphere. Poets want to be loved; and what is a greater showing of love, paying ten bucks for a book of verse or risking your life by reading it?

It takes the patient labor of generations to cast the clichés of history (though sometimes but a few moments of genius to turn them back into lumps of lead). The merging of notions like "freedom" and "culture" into one concept has given the world a cliché as enduring as "national character," and all the other old favorites. Now that the relevant stereotypes have been dismantled, the women of our time no longer tremble at the approach of a lecherous Frenchman, and few men are affected by the plight of a captured trout—unless, of course, they are members of the Sierra Club. (Real men, however, don't belong to the Sierra Club, so that doesn't count.)

But we are still not content to think that the Declaration of Independence, combined with the freedom of speech, municipal zoning laws, Monday garbage collection, and the nonprofit corporations act, has given us the relative paradise in which we actually dwell. We want to think that *because it's a paradise* it will be known to posterity as a Schubert's Vienna—rather than the Norman Mailer New York which it actually is. And when we are asked why, we blink and answer in all earnestness: "Because there is cultural freedom."

I will admit that under certain extreme conditions, the "absolute zero" of political freedom, such as existed in China in the 20th century A.D., under Mao, or in the 3rd century B.C., under a man named Ch'in, the forbidden walls separating the official culture from the subterranean are blasted away, and all independent intellectual activity ends. But in what can be described as merely a *harsh* political climate—Schubert's Vienna, as Sir Ernst Gombrich reminded us in a recent issue of *The Yale Literary Magazine*, was also Metternich's Austria—culture has

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been known to blossom like Connecticut laurel after a summer rain.

The problem of culture, a problem of whose existence America was accidentally reminded by a Russian eccentric, has not a political, but a cultural solution. The moving forces of culture, as I said, are fueled by love; and while a free, commercial society is not moved by the love that makes martyrs, books of verse need not cost a paltry $10, either. After all, paintings do not, nor does a box at the Metropolitan Opera. Perhaps we will live to see a slim, simply produced volume of a friend's verse priced at $1,000 a copy. And then, I believe, we will know that the free society's approximation, or equivalent, of the underground reader's love has been found, and that America's cultural problem has at last been solved.

The assertion that the problem of culture has a cultural solution is not as reassuring, however, as a promise that this solution will soon be found. Much depends on destiny, and destiny often takes political forms. You remember the speech about Caesar that Cassius makes in *Julius Caesar*:

> Why, man, he doth bestride the narrow world
> Like a Colossus, and we petty men
> Walk under his huge legs and peep about
> To find ourselves dishonorable graves.
> Men at some time are masters of their fates.
> The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,
> But in ourselves, that we are underlings.

Cassius, of course, is the bad guy, and we know from what happens in the play that he is wrong, and that the Lord works in mysterious ways. It is interesting that in the very next line Cassius incites Brutus by setting up one of the earliest examples of moral equivalence in the history of demagoguery: "Brutus," he says, "and Caesar."

> What should be in that *Caesar*?
> Why should that name be sounded more than yours?
> Write them together, yours is as fair a name.
> Sound them, it doth become the mouth as well.
> Weigh them, it is as heavy.

The demagogue in Shakespeare stresses equivalence and self-reliance. Not wishing to follow his example, I shall conclude, without promises or predictions, by merely expressing my *hope* that this free society solves its cultural problem—and in so doing masters its cultural, and therefore political, fate. cc

Waiting for the End

(continued from page 5)

meant a few brilliant (but degenerate) trifles—even rotting corpses glow in the dark—and then virtually nothing, a darkness illuminated occasionally by Irishmen like Sheridan, Wilde, and Shaw. By the 20th century, the cosmopolitan principle had triumphed in all the arts. Writers that stick to their country and its traditions are the rare exception: Yeats in Ireland, Péguy in France, Faulkner in the U.S. Most of the rest have done their best to escape.

As writers and musicians and painters more and more sought out each other's company in New York, London, and above all, Paris, they found they had less and less to say to ordinary readers, concert-goers, and Sunday painters. The amateur, insisted Ezra Pound, is the enemy of true art. The poet must be a *professional*. And so he is now. While Sophocles and Sir Philip Sidney were only gentlemen-scribblers, Robert Creeley and Denise Levertov are professionals, which means no one buys their books or attends their readings, apart from other professionals—poets, critics, and teachers. There are still real poets, but it must be terribly discouraging for them to be lumped together with the poseurs who seem to be in charge.

Art, in the sense used by the culturati, is dead, because they killed it. They had help, of course, principally from the masters of a society infatuated with material progress. But rather than going through a "who killed cock robin" bill of indictments, we might just give the corpse a decent burial and wait for a general resurrection. We can still listen to old music—even an occasional bit of Prokofiev or Stravinsky—read old poets, dipping from time to time into a few contemporaries like Larkin, Conquest, Robert Penn Warren, or Geoffrey Hill. We can still expect a gifted novelist to come along once in a while, because the novel remains a partly popular form. But in general, most of us will find ourselves sticking to the old stuff, the tried-and-true, the classics.

It is a frightening thought. Less than 100 years ago, the recent compositions of Brahms and Wagner, Puccini and Debussy could fill a concert hall. Alfred Tennyson was mobbed—politely of course—on the street by fans who admired his poetry as much as people today admire, say, Bruce Springsteen. They had their classics then, but until recently people were most alive to the art of their generation, which is as it should be. Art is much more than "the best that has been thought and known," as Arnold used to preach; it is a way of getting a grip on our experience. For good or ill, it is rooted in the clay of everyday life. It may soar to the eternal, but it rides (like Aristophanes' Trygaeus) on a dung beetle. To give up on the art of the present is to give up on living in the present.

Nostalgia is a thin and bitter diet that can starve the sensibilities. Rather than suffer the fate of Robinson's Minniver Cheevy, "child of scorn," who "cursed his fate and kept on drinking," we will have to keep an eye out for signs of hope—the splendid Australian novelist Randolph Stow, poets like Frederick Turner, who are rediscovering meter. Even the "neo-Romantic" revival of chromaticism holds out some promise—although not much. But with the enemy still in possession of the citadel, most of us will be forced to turn to the only arts still capable of speaking to the living: movies, television, and popular music. They may never reach the heights of serious art, but they are what we have, and we must pay attention, because as one of our poets, Mr. Dylan, has warned us:

> He who is not busy being born
> is busy dying.

—Thomas Fleming

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COMMENDABLES

Criticism With Character

by Thomas D. Eisele

George A. Panichas: *The Courage of Judgment: Essays in Criticism, Culture, and Society*; University of Tennessee Press; Knoxville; $24.50.

This book presents essays written by George Panichas, which initially appeared from 1962 to 1980. Panichas's essays take the measure of a generation. What is their verdict?

It is not a happy one. Panichas finds modern conditions to be those defined by technology and Benthamism, by empiricism and quantification, and everywhere "humanistic values . . . have come under threat and attack." Panichas urges his readers "to challenge and to resist precisely those habits of mind that lead to the ascendancy of quantifying criteria at all levels of life and letters." It is Panichas's unceasing effort to unveil the "habits of mind" that define modern existence and to locate the roots of our language, culture, and society at large.

Panichas wants to maintain—or, better, to reestablish—"the character of criticism," by which he means, specifically, the moral dimensions of criticism. "The need to foment and instill critical leadership is a moral need," one based upon "the deeper meaning of life as judgment, as conduct, as character." The character traits required for any criticism worthy of the name are moral attributes, then, and their possession by a critic signals to Panichas that critic's awareness of his responsibilities. "Authentic fulfillment of critical responsibility demands a rigorous commitment to principles of order, to the making of hard choices and categorical decisions, to the selection and espousal not merely of aesthetic, literary, or linguistic values but of ethical and moral derivatives —and imperatives." Panichas's ideal critic understands "the necessities of courage and judgment."

"Lacking the courage of judgment," Panichas observes, some "have forcibly reconciled themselves to . . . new conditions, even as they express serious reservations concerning the changes that are swiftly, furiously occurring. Others have enthusiastically enlisted in the ranks of those who herald the new Logos, insofar as they refuse to accept (even to understand) the role of moral imperatives in imagination, in criticism, in thought, and in culture and society as a whole." In such an atmosphere of disorientation and disintegration of the moral sense, the "humane element in criticism, with its overarching verities, thus becomes still another victim of a continuing fragmentation. Identifying character as a centripetal element of the critical function becomes an utter impossibility." To try to account for our critical failures by saying that they result from our growing moral relativism or moral neutrality is to say next to nothing, for these labels are merely a diagnosis, whereas we want an etiology and a cure.

Panichas accounts for our neglect of moral necessities by pointing to "the decline or even the disappearance of the humanistic tradition."

> The ethos of this tradition is centrally and singularly ethical and moral, stressing as it does the sanctity of human worth. In effect the humanistic ethos validates, qualitatively, man's destiny and resists relentless attempts to technicalize, to objectify, and to dehumanize man's significance and, indeed, his essentially spiritual being.

This is not an endorsement of secular humanism; *that* alternative, says Panichas, remains a "critical humanism without a metaphysical basis," one that accordingly "remains incomplete, ineffectual. It fails, in short, as a totality of spiritual value." The confrontation between the new Logos and the old Logos Panichas sees as one between "the twin tyranny of the secular and the material," and the "permanent things, as transcendent and metaphysical constituents of humanism." As Eliot observed in "Second Thoughts About Humanism" (1929): "There is no avoiding that dilemma: you must be either a naturalist or a supernaturalist." Panichas casts his lot with the latter, with the Word. And, having done so, he sees in the modern conditions of criticism an exemplification of the conditions of modern existence. "As such, the crisis of criticism is related to the continuing crisis of faith, which in turn leads to the crisis of humanistic civilization."

That we are out of touch with those virtues of prudence and justice that Sam Johnson says are "of all times and of all places," no one can deny. But have "we" ever been in possession of these "permanent things," these "overarching verities" or "transcendent values," as Panichas calls them? On various scattered occasions, undoubtedly some individuals and small groups —saints, heroes, and poets—have. But as a society or as a nation? I think not. Rather, I believe that no "golden age" of adherence to these values can be found, because the humanistic tradition itself does not imagine its values to be historically fulfilled. Its vision, instead, depends upon our keeping before ourselves these "verities" as constitutive human ideals, as models of what it is to be truly or fully human. That we rarely achieve them in fact is less important than whether or not we continue to aspire to their achievement. But, at the moment, it seems that we no longer so aspire.

It is this lack of aspiration that Panichas confronts in this book. "Criticism is by its very nature confrontation —confrontation that ultimately rests on the courage of judgment." Panichas enacts this confrontational strategy in his writing by placing his courageous judgments in our way, making our continued or habitual following of certain ways of thinking (and of seeing, of judging) an effort, something that we no longer can do thoughtlessly or heedlessly. By making himself an obstacle to our habituated forms of thought, he means to provoke us into summoning up our courage and exercising our perhaps atrophied capacity to judge for ourselves.

Whether he is consistently successful in this attempt, I am not certain. The role of *provocateur* can become confining, and the voice of the moralist deafening, or deadening. Still, Panichas is right to insist that "a combative dissent-

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ing criticism is especially needed in a time when critical standards and cultural values are under heavy attack, when change and innovation are upon us everywhere. If a critic can do nothing but warn of lost bearings and wrong directions, while at the same time instancing the moral infirmities of any human situation in which rights replace obligations, he is fulfilling his function." I would add only that the critic must also be alive to those aspects of modern thought that have made it both viable and attractive. The sensitive and sensible critic must acknowledge that part of himself that is attracted to modernism, to the advantages and powers it offers him. There are reasons that this tradition has survived and achieved ascendancy. The critic alive to this struggle within himself will find, as Panichas himself says, that "his critical reports are reports about the struggle that rages in the world—and in himself." Such reports, if they assess candidly both sides of this struggle, may truly offer us—as Panichas so often does in this book—something that we can care about. cc

Thomas Eisele makes his first appearance in Chronicles.

Signs of Life

by Clyde Wilson

William C. Havard: *The Recovery of Political Theory: Limits and Possibilities*; Louisiana State University Press; Baton Rouge.

The ancient Western tradition of political thought, appropriate to men seeking freedom and virtue in community, has in our century been hounded into obscure corners by materialists and romantic revolutionaries. Yet, here and there, the tradition remains alive and even shows signs of a renewed vitality.

One such sign is the work of William C. Havard, professor of political science at Vanderbilt University and former president of the Southern Political Science Association, some of whose occasional articles have been here collected. Havard's work is impressive in two respects. First, it offers a critique of the reigning "value-free" empiricism of academic political science. Havard subjects this misguided orthodoxy not only to the rigors of philosophy but also to the lash of satire, as in the hilarious essay on "The New Lexicon of Politics: or, How to Engage in Research Without Really Thinking."

The second notable virtue of Havard's approach is that it links him to his comrades-in-arms. This linkage is acknowledged in two exceptional essays on "The Politics of *I'll Take My Stand*" and on the underappreciated Michael Oakeshott. Two other pieces pay homage to the late Eric Voegelin, Havard's teacher and friend. In all, Havard's book is a treasure of broad learning and common sense. cc

Clyde Wilson is editor of The Papers of John C. Calhoun *and professor of history at the University of South Carolina.*

Reagan's Rhetoric

by Christopher Muldor

***The Triumph of the American Spirit: The Presidential Speeches of Ronald Reagan*; Edited by Emil Arca and Gregory J. Pamel; National Reproductions; Detroit.**

It may well be indicative of real progress in America that we are now able to read the Presidential speeches of a man that leading commentators frequently declared unelectable a decade ago. But now that Ronald Reagan's electability is established beyond doubt, the national media have been busy tagging him as the "most ideological" of Presidents. The ordinary citizen, vaguely uncomfortable in a world of instant analyses that he never made, might just welcome the opportunity to examine, without prejudice, the ideas and beliefs of Mr. Reagan. Fortunately, Emil Arca and Gregory J. Pamel have compiled a cross section of the President's addresses, one that covers most of the major issues and themes of Reagan's Presidency.

The alleged ideological rigidity of Reagan turns out, upon examination, to consist of little but a realism concerning the failed ideologies of the 60's and 70's. The initial optimism of the Great Society—the belief that every wrinkle in the human condition could be ironed out through government programs—gave way by the late 70's to "malaise," the nagging suspicion that government could hardly function at all. During that period, new "rights" were constantly being discovered for the unproductive, the antisocial, and the bizarre; Federal programs and intrusions grew apace. In contrast, national defense was neglected, since détente committed the country to a quiet acceptance of aggressive Soviet behavior in exchange for pleasant Soviet rhetoric.

Ronald Reagan is consistent in excoriating the policies and mentality that turned the prosperous and strong America of 1960 into the severely weakened America of 1980. Reagan's appeal is not so much to ideology as to common sense; his injunction is to "look at the record," as Al Smith would have said. National security *is* the first priority of the Federal government; poverty *was* being successfully fought so long as a growing economy, low inflation, and consistent increases in productivity were the rule; violence and lack of parental involvement *are* antithetical to education; the Soviet Union *is* an evil empire.

Despite Reagan's frequent attacks on big government, though, in practice he is the defender of a remarkable amount of governmental activity in the domestic arena. The "safety net" is a prime example. Even if domestic spending was reduced at once by some $200 billion annually—a politically "unthinkable" suggestion—it would *still* be triple 1960 domestic spending in real, after-inflation terms.

Rhetoric is important. If some people believe that Reagan wants to return the nation to the Coolidge era, the reason is partly that he sometimes sounds as if he would like to do so, even though he intends nothing of the sort. Sooner or later, one suspects, conservative Americans will have to deal with the incongruence of political rhetoric reminiscent of *The Road to Serfdom* and of persistent defense of a variety of liberal programs and initiatives.

To be sure, the Reagan Administration has effected a dramatic reduction in the inflation rate and a rejuvenation of the military. Still, there is room for doubt over whether America is standing as tall in the 80's as some of the President's speeches suggest. Federal outlays still consume a larger share of the Gross National Product than they did under Carter, and, even with the increase in defense spending (now sputtering to a halt), that spending is only 15 percent higher in real-dollar terms now than it was 30 years ago. Despite today's reputedly conservative climate, many Americans seem incapable of grasping the nature of the Soviet threat, as evidenced by the "shock" at Reagan's evil empire speech.

These Presidential addresses will certainly not settle the question of whether a realignment of the American political spectrum is taking place. They do, though, present us with something for which we can all be grateful: the return

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of some measure of reason, civility, and common sense to our politics after one of the more dismal periods in American history. cc

Christopher Muldor is a criminologist in Philadelphia.

Smashing "Ugly Monuments"

by David Vicinanzo

Mortimer J. Adler: *Ten Philosophical Mistakes*; Macmillan; New York; $12.95.

Adler begins his latest book with Aristotle's admonition: "The least initial deviation from the truth is multiplied later a thousandfold." Adler concludes with a recommendation: "The recovery of basic truths, long hidden from view, would eradicate errors that have such disastrous consequences in modern times." For 10 delightfully lucid chapters in between, he uncovers and corrects the "initial deviations" that have generated the contemporary short-circuit in philosophical thinking.

Consider Locke's postulate that an "idea" is *that which* the individual apprehends," instead of *that by which* the individual apprehends some object." If we take Locke's theory seriously, then the bottle of wine between us on the dinner table is not real, but "an idea in our minds." Locke did not even need common sense to discover his error; he could have consulted Aquinas, who, good Dominican that he was, had demonstrated that the wine was real, and that ontological teetotalism such as Locke's prohibited "the possibility of our having any knowledge of a reality outside . . . our own minds." Still, many *have* taken Locke's notion seriously and its tangled outgrowths —skepticism, subjectivism, and solipsism—prevail today.

Consider also the assertion of Hobbes, Berkeley, and Hume that the human mind is a mere "sense-perceptor." As a purely sensitive faculty, Adler says, the mind would not have any abstract ideas. Man could not apprehend the objects of mathematics, nor conceive metaphysical objects such as God or the soul, nor converse about such abstractions as liberty, justice, virtue, and the infinite: "None of these can be perceived by the senses. None is a sensible particular." But of course men *can* conceive of such things (even Locke conceded that "Brutes abstract not"); the intellect—the part of the mind that does not simply receive and react to sensation—is one great attribute that makes us different *in kind*, not just degree, from other animals. Nonetheless, the mistaken view of the human mind persists, undermining individual responsibility and making human life less inviolable and—the shame of the 20th century—more expendable.

In correcting other mistakes, Adler applies special scrutiny to Hume and Kant, whose works represent opposite faces of the same error: the definition of "knowledge" as exclusively the product of methodical investigation and probative data. By this definition, philosophy and metaphysics are discounted as mere "opinion," and "real knowledge" becomes the possession of specialists who progressively insulate their microcosmic subjects from the corpus of knowledge and the experience of the human race. Philosophy and the collective experience of mankind, Adler argues, ultimately are more essential to human existence than the germ-free bubble of the "expert"; without them, we are unable to understand everything else we know, and the path to happiness and wisdom lies dark and untraveled.

In the latter half of the book, Adler addresses less esoteric mistakes, such as the "astounding, yet in our days widely prevalent, denial of human nature." Adler wonders, too, how the human race survived long enough for Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau to invent the "state of nature" and "social contract" theories if the family and rudimentary society are not "natural."

Adler insists that the philosophical mistakes are simple ones and that their proliferation is the result of "culpable ignorance":

> They are ugly monuments to the failure of education—failures due, on the one hand, to corruption in the tradition of learning and, on the other hand, to an antagonistic attitude toward or even contempt for the past, for the achievements of those who have come before.

The solution is to reopen the philosophical classics of pre-17th-century Western civilization, which have answers that a shallow and dissipated contemporary philosophy cannot provide. Adler is convinced that these landmarks will help us to undo the mistakes that promote needless misery in modern times. cc

David Vicinanzo is a recent graduate of Fordham Law School.

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IN FOCUS

TRUTH in Green Trousers

by Brian Murray

***Ezra Pound and Dorothy Shakespear: Their Letters: 1909-1914*; Edited by Omar Pound and A. Walton Litz; New Directions; New York.**

When the young American poet Ezra Pound arrived in London in the autumn of 1908, he had considerably more on his mind than a tour of Westminster Abbey and a boat ride down the Thames. He was determined to become a noted poet, and—convinced that his own country was little more than a cultural slum—he had come to England to launch his career. In London, Pound put in long hours: he wrote incessantly and lectured often; he sought out all the right connections. In little more than a year, Pound had managed to form friendships with such prominent literary figures as Elkin Mathews, Maurice Hewlett, Ernest Rhys, and William Butler Yeats.

Pound was introduced to Yeats by Mrs. Olivia Shakespear, the wife of a prosperous London solicitor and a

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semi-popular novelist in her own right. Mrs. Shakespear was stately and stunning; Pound thought her "undoubtedly the most charming woman in London." From the start, Pound was also attracted to Mrs. Shakespear's daughter Dorothy, a beautiful and well-educated but markedly reserved young woman who, like her mother, was more than a little intrigued by matters mystical and occult. Certainly, as her private notebook jottings show, Dorothy was utterly enchanted with the handsome and audacious Pound, who in those days—as Ford Madox Ford later remembered—sported "trousers made of green billiard cloth, a pink coat, a blue shirt, a tie hand-painted by a Japanese friend, an immense sombrero, a flaming beard cut to a point and a single, large blue ear-ring." "Ezra," Dorothy told her diary soon after meeting Pound, "is not as other men are; he has found the Centre—TRUTH." "Ezra! Ezra!" she wrote, "beautiful face! . . . You are all a dream—your ideas, your knowledge, your bluey eyes. . . . All things you handle have a veil drawn round them, that draws them towards yourself, brings them to your dream land, your wonderful land of discovered Truth."

Between the time of their meeting and their marriage in April 1914, Ezra Pound and Dorothy Shakespear conducted a rather irregular and often epistolary courtship, since Pound, ever restless, traveled frequently from London to the Continent, and he once returned—for an eight-month stretch—to the United States. The Pounds remained married until Ezra's death in November 1972. But during that time, Pound's increasing self-absorption and contentiousness undoubtedly caused the quietly devoted Dorothy considerable pain. In the early 1920's, for example, Pound openly entered into what would prove to be a lifelong affair with Olga Rudge, a young and attractive violinist. In 1925 Miss Rudge gave birth to Pound's daughter, Mary—several months before Dorothy bore Pound a son, Omar.

As Omar Pound and Walton Litz suggest, the letters that Ezra and Dorothy sent each other between 1909 and 1914 have "all the appeal of any private correspondence between two intelligent people who have not yet entered what Henry James called 'the country of the general lost freshness.'" Readers may also sense "a bittersweet quality which comes from our knowledge of what was to follow": Pound's "increasing isolation and obsessions of the 1920s and 1930s"; his grotesque wartime broadcasts; his postwar imprisonment in a Washington, DC, hospital for the mentally unbalanced and the criminally insane; his final "penitential silence."

Ezra Pound and Dorothy Shakespear contains 235 items, including early entries from Dorothy's notebook and letters that Pound exchanged with Dorothy's father, a practical and judicious man who obviously did not greatly relish the idea of his only child becoming the wife of a brash, self-employed poet who favored green felt trousers and hand-painted ties. This volume tells us much about the attitudes and customs that prevailed among Britain's bohemians and its bourgeoisie in the post-Victorian era. It is also of considerable literary importance, since most of the more than 200 letters that Pound and Dorothy exchanged before marriage have not been previously published. In many of these letters, Pound discusses the works and the activities of a wide variety of his contemporaries, including Yeats, Wyndham Lewis, and Richard Aldington. The range of these discussions will make this collection of interest not only to Pound scholars, but also to all readers who seek to understand more clearly the intellectual and aesthetic milieu in which modern American and British literature began to take shape. ∞

Brian Murray is professor of English at Youngstown State University.

Threepenny Marxist

by John Moeller

Ronald Hayman: *Brecht: A Biography*; Oxford University Press; New York.

The Marxist and the artist view human existence in fundamentally different ways. Marxism regards human existence as absolutely knowable because scientific laws govern history and because materialism underlies all of existence. It is not so simple for the artist. Although the artist may study history, he knows that nature is not a closed circle within our grasp, and he regards the human condition as an incredible mystery.

Despite the inherent tension between artistic endeavor and Marxist thought, many have tried to combine the two. On one extreme are the writers, poets, and playwrights whose Marxist inclinations prevail. They end up producing thinly disguised propaganda and are artists in name only. On the other extreme are Marxists who follow their art to its frontiers only to discover that it challenges the first principles of their political beliefs. Eventually, they must forsake their Marxism if they intend to be faithful to their art. Such were the six writers who narrate their fall from Marxism in Crossman's *The God That Failed*.

The third pattern—the middle way—is to temper the artistic and Marxist elements until they can coexist. For many, that means becoming a middling artist and a middling Marxist. A few escape such mediocrity, including Bertolt Brecht, here depicted by Ronald Hayman.

Brecht frequently envisioned his plays as being like trials in which the audience could judge the characters and their actions. He relied extensively on the use of narrative, placed great emphasis on the objective, external facts, and always wanted the audience to remember that they were, in fact, watching a play. Hayman's biography provides a similar drama of externals, with a year-by-year (and sometimes day-by-day) account of the objective facts of Brecht's life. Hayman does intersperse Brecht's poems throughout the text to illustrate Brecht's thoughts, and he dips into psychoanalysis to explain Brecht's relationships with his wife and various mistresses and into critical theory to assess Brecht's dramatic theories and productions. But generally Hayman simply provides evidence and lets the reader himself judge Brecht.

And what should that judgment be? Was Brecht somehow capable of combining art with a commitment to Marxism? The answer, based on Hayman's evidence, is a qualified yes. But the qualifications are serious enough to suggest that artistic achievement owes nothing to ideological purity.

Brecht did actively participate in Marxist causes, and he did present himself to the world as a good Marxist. But when one studies the life, it is apparent that his wife, Helene Weigel, was his real political conscience. She was the one with a "quasi-religious faith in communism," whereas Brecht was preoccupied with improving his artistry. Brecht's professed Marxism may explain why he lived the last years of his life in East Germany, but it hardly tells us why he deviously maneuvered to gain Austrian citizenship. The problem was that Brecht wanted to move about and practice his art with the freedom that only such citizenship afforded.

For Brecht was an artist long before

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he realized that Marxism mirrored many of the emotions that already defined his personality and art. Hating his teachers' authoritativeness, he naturally despised the capitalist's hold over his workers. Having witnessed the growth of Nazism in his homeland, Brecht was convinced that an evil society corrupted good people. Marxism universalized what Brecht felt.

But like so many others, Brecht failed to distinguish Marx the social critic from Marx the savior of society. Marx did provide important insights in his explanation of alienation. It is not surprising that the artist who also is challenging society will feel comfortable with that element of Marxism. It does not follow, however, that Marx's solution to social problems is equally valid, especially since that solution limits itself to only one dimension of human existence. It is ironic—and sad—when the artist who begins with the aim of providing a fictive vision of the whole settles for a political philosophy of the part.

Fortunately, the tension and dialectic in Brecht's art never fully surrendered to Marxist formulas but remained vibrant and alive. He frequently collaborated with others in a genuine give-and-take relationship, and he rewrote his own songs and scenes and entire plays over and over, constantly fiddling with them for reasons far from ideology. The consequence was that even when Brecht tried to make his "Mother Courage" a mean-spirited woman, imbued with capitalism, war, and greed, the audience (to his chagrin) identified and sympathized with the old woman. They did so because in that character Brecht the artist betrayed Brecht the Marxist by revealing a small part of the mystery of our existence. ∞

John Moeller teaches political science at Luther College, Decorah, Iowa.

Trenchcoat Treachery

by Michael Warder

Viktor Suvorov: *Inside Soviet Military Intelligence*; Macmillan; New York; $15.95.

This is a dry, almost mechanical description of a poorly understood but intriguing and vitally important subject: the GRU. After the KGB, the GRU (Chief Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff) is arguably the second largest and most powerful intelligence agency in the world. The author, whose true name and identity are masked, is a defector uniquely qualified to reveal the purpose, structure, and methods of the GRU. Unlike John Barron's readable books on the KGB, this work unfortunately reads like a biology textbook.

With an estimated 100,000 uniformed troops, 5,000 senior officers, undercover agents who recruit non-Soviet spies, the GRU seeks out information on the military capabilities of its enemies. Although smaller than the KGB, the GRU has a larger budget. Why? Because all of the many Soviet ministries charged with the development and deployment of military weapons provide the GRU with money for buying or stealing the latest technology. Beginning with information about the atom bomb, the track record so far is impressive. With the Soviets falling behind in advanced technologies, the GRU will need to step up its industrial espionage.

Many of the most recent sensational spy cases—the father-son network of the Walkers, for instance—are probably GRU rather than KGB operations. Suvorov fully describes the techniques of recruitment, initial payment, and subsequent extortion. He also explains that communist sympathizers in target countries are never used as intelligence agents. The GRU finds success in first enticing a selected informant through the offer of personal gain and then —after he has broken the law —controlling him through threats of exposure.

In addition to its agents collecting "strategic" intelligence necessary for achieving military objectives, the GRU has trained about 30,000 elite cutthroats for the task of assassinating military and political leaders behind enemy lines. These *spetsnaz* units, which operate in six-man teams with elaborate support mechanisms, are also trained to destroy the enemy's key power and transportation centers. These undoubtedly are the "frogmen" which appear unannounced in Sweden with increasing frequency.

One secret the GRU and its bitter rival, the KGB, appear unable to discover, Suvorov says, is how to feed the Soviet Union. He does not see how either of the agencies will find this information. Even if one of them did, the other must destroy it as a doctrinal deviation. ∞

Michael Warder is director of public affairs for The Rockford Institute.

Looking for Love in All the Wrong Places

Irving Singer: *The Nature of Love*; Volume 1: *Plato to Luther* (Second Edition); Volume 2: *Courtly and Romantic*; University of Chicago; Chicago.

Love is everywhere the theme of popular culture, but only rarely a subject for serious contemporary philosophy. Irving Singer, professor of philosophy at MIT, attempts to remedy this imbalance with these two volumes, the first two parts of a trilogy. Laudable in breadth and clarity, his work nonetheless reveals only too well why most modern philosophers are embarrassed by love.

When once defined within Plato's search for the Good or the Christian's pilgrimage to God, love was a thing of intellectual and moral substance. It dictated normative patterns of loyalty and order and so distinguished itself from groundless emotionalism. But as a creature of the 20th century, Singer repudiates Plato's Good as "a dubious abstraction" and proclaims himself "not partisan to any variety of religious faith." Not for him is the love subordinated to a philosophic quest or proffered as an incomplete representation of God's love for man. Hardly a rare personal decision, Singer's rejection of Platonic and Christian love seems the natural outcome of cultural trends he traces in these two books. Even in the Middle Ages, the older traditions suffered from unresolved internal tensions separating sanctified marriage from celibate monasticism. The Reformation challenge to the scholastic understanding of *caritas* rendered love yet more problematic. But religious disputes over love were simply left behind when a new, this-worldly understanding of sexual love gained ascendance through the Provençal troubadours, the Renaissance humanists, and the Romantics. Romantic poets occasionally quoted Plato or Christ, but it was their own autonomous imaginations—not God or the Good—which gave the new vision of love its shape and content.

Singer casts his lot with the Romantics. Disdainful of the "realists" who regard love as a mere mask for selfish appetites, Singer champions a love ennobled by the "amorous imagination." Such love is a creative act, a spontaneous "bestowal" endowing the beloved

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with "value that would not exist otherwise." Because "bestowal generates a new society by the sheer force of emotional attachment," it undermines established "conventions" and is "always a threat to the status quo." The lofty imagination of a Shelley, for instance, must not be restrained by "taboos about divorce or extramarital experimentation."

Defining love as an "imaginative artifact," however, creates irreconcilable contradictions. Confronted by the Marquis de Sade's idealization of brutal self-assertion in sex, how does Singer respond? He will not quote Scripture. Tradition and history he finds suggestive, but he denies them ontological roots: "In itself human experience is a flux of largely chaotic and sporadic adventures." What's left for a philosopher at one of America's leading universities? Nothing but personal preference: he opposes de Sade with only "my own moral orientation, and my own intuitive sense of what is real and important in human nature." Such bald subjectivism is disconcerting, but even more troubling is Singer's cheerful acquiescence in the collapse of all the standards previously guiding love. "Our own age is one in which previous idealizations linger without being meaningful as once they were. A long tradition may be coming to an end." And so from the bathhouses of San Francisco to the porn shops of Brooklyn to the philosophy departments of Massachusetts, "love" now means whatever the imaginative say it means. (BJC) ∞

An Uncritical Mixture

by Edward S. Shapiro

***Foundations of the Frankfurt School of Social Research*; Edited by Judith Marcus and Zoltan Tar; Transaction Books; New Brunswick, NJ.**

From its inception in 1923 as the Institute of Social Research until the death of Theodor Adorno in 1969, the Frankfurt School was at the forefront of the debate over the meaning of Marxism. Its leading members included the psychologist Erich Fromm, the sociologists Adorno and Max Horkheimer, the philosopher Herbert Marcuse, the political scientist Franz Neumann, and Leo Lowenthal, the student of popular culture and mass media. With Hitler's rise to power, the school moved to New York in the 1930's, returning to Frankfurt two decades later. Its most famous publication during its American stay was *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950) which, among other things, claimed that an incipient fascist mentality existed in the United States, similar to what the Frankfurt intellectuals had seen in Germany—an argument more significant for what it says about the Frankfurt School's assumptions than for what it says about American politics and society. Its American interlude took place at the same time that the Frankfurt intellectuals repudiated orthodox Marxism, became deeply pessimistic regarding Western civilization, attempted to formulate a theory of fascism, and became concerned with such non-Marxist themes as the critique of bureaucratization and of mass culture.

The major effort of the Frankfurt School was that of elaborating "a critical theory" of society. Critical theory meant both a critique of all those ideologies, including Bolshevism, which distorted reality and legitimized social domination, as well as an explanation of the transformation of society, of the nature of culture, and of the relation between the individual and society. Premised upon an extreme cultural elitism (expressed in an admiration for avant-garde art and music), critical theory took as its most ambitious aim the revision of classical Marxism, which had falsely predicted revolution in the West and had failed to account for such modern phenomena as fascism, Stalinism, bureaucracy, regimentation, mechanization, impersonality, cultural standardization, and totalitarianism.

The Frankfurt thinkers sought not to reject but to revitalize Marxism by making use of Weberian sociology, Freudian psychoanalytic theory (as in *The Authoritarian Personality*), and the analysis of popular culture. They particularly opposed the determinism of "historical materialism," asserting that the importance of subjective experience in social development had been recognized by Marx himself. In its refusal to see economic and social developments as autonomous and predetermined, the new critical theory sought to reconcile socialism and liberty through analysis of how ideologies influence perceptions of reality. This approach entailed a rejection of Leninism and of all sexual and psychological repression, and an emphasis instead on the emancipation of the individual. Because of his extolling of personal spontaneity and sexual gratification, Herbert Marcuse even became one of the gurus of the "New Left" of the 1960's. But judging from the Marcus-Tar collection of articles on the Frankfurt School, it has required a faith greater than that of Jerry Falwell to continue believing in what Leszek Kolakowski, the eminent modern historian of Marxist thought, has called "the greatest fantasy of our century." Containing essays by a diverse group of conservatives, liberals, and neo-Marxists, the Marcus-Tar volume is the most comprehensive anthology on the history, philosophy, aesthetics, politics, sociology, and economics of the Frankfurt School. Almost all of the 25 authors, which include Karl Popper and Paul Lazarsfeld, agree that the attempt to formulate a "critical theory" was unsuccessful. By the 1960's, Adorno, *et al.*, were even under severe attack from young German radicals, precisely that group which one would have assumed would be the most hospitable audience. To an outsider, the failure of the Frankfurt School was virtually predetermined, since Marxism and German philosophical idealism, Marx and Freud, and socialism and individualism constitute three oil-and-water pairs. ∞

Edward S. Shapiro is professor of history at Seton Hall University.

Playing Pointless Games

by Eugene England

Richard A. Lanham: *Literacy and the Survival of Humanism*; Yale University Press; New Haven, CT.

Lanham is certainly ambitious enough. He proposes to resolve "three overlapping perplexities":

> a literacy crisis so widespread it has shaken our national self-esteem as an educated democracy; a school and college curriculum that no longer knows what subjects should be studied or when; and a humanism so directionless, unreasoned, and sentimental that it seems almost to quest for Senator Proxmire's Golden Fleece.

Lanham's solutions, however, require that we give up the Judeo-Christian (and Platonic) view of man—as having a preexistent or God-given "self," with its own intrinsic drive to purposeful behavior—and accept in its place "Post-Darwinian Humanism." That is Lanham's term for a scientistic view of man who uses language—especially in

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its stylistic playfulness—as an evolutionary adaptation that maintains "social reality" but provides no access to truth.

For more than a decade Lanham has tried to demonstrate that the Western humanist tradition, because of the "stupidity" of Aristotle and Thomas More, has left play and game and conscious stylistics out of its sense of human motive. Thus, the only salvation for any of us is to make style *the* subject of freshman composition courses, then gradually of all the curriculum, and finally the center of civilized activity. Lanham is driven by a messianic determination to bring us all out of "Eden" (the world of those who share Aristotle's erroneous notion that "people always do things for practical purposes") and into "Post-Darwinia," where everyone is devoted to "rhetoric for the sake of the contest, argument for the pleasures of contention." According to Lanham, we must stamp out all Edenic concern for clarity and begin "making up 'reality'" by "speaking for fun," "for the hell of it," "talking just to keep the social drama going."

Lanham is very good at pegging the current scandals of academia: the gulf between literary study and composition; the irrelevance of graduate training in the humanities to the teaching assignments that follow in basic writing and general education; the exploitation of ill-equipped and underpaid graduate students and younger faculty, left to face an overwhelming literacy crisis (brought on by neglect of the high schools and by a changing, multilingual populace) while the older faculty pursue research-oriented career games in their mature but increasingly irrelevant discipline. His arguments for dealing with these scandals through integration of rhetorical, literary, and professional studies—in something like the old lit/comp classes, but informed by greater emphasis on stylistic expression and understanding—are appealing and convincing, and his program at UCLA seems to be working. But others —such as James Billington and Wayne Booth—have pointed out these same scandals and made promising suggestions based on very different views of human motive.

Besides, Lanham's own dichotomy between purpose and play, between *Eden* and *Post-Darwinia* is false and (in its evaluative purposiveness) self-defeating. It is hard to imagine purely Edenic people (simplistic, stodgy, and naively convinced they possess an "independent ontological security guaranteed by God") who always do things for entirely purposive reasons rather than for competition or stylistic display. It is harder still to imagine why anyone should praise Post-Darwinians who spend "a lot of time . . . acting for the sake of acting," or "just screwing around." How can such a reductionist vision of humanity—bleak and trivial —ever overcome the problems of illiteracy or provide a surer basis for humanism? Certainly few will be impressed by Lanham's misguided application of his theory to Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and More's *Utopia*—works that are more self-consciously stylistic than Lanham will allow.

Lanham's revision of modern humanistic curricula could only institutionalize such misreadings of the classics. And though Lanham claims to be a post-Darwinian, it is unclear how his all-out attack on the prevailing "Clarity-Brevity-Sincerity School" of composition would foster the survival of the species. No doubt humanists should devote more unashamed attention to style as intrinsically valuable, but as a friend in technical writing pointed out to me, "If your Volkswagen stalls at the top of Teton Pass at 30 below and you reach in the jockeybox for your manual, it better be clear, brief, and sincere."

Eugene England is professor of English at Brigham Young University.

Scientism's Sins

Wolfgang Smith: *Cosmos and Transcendence: Breaking Through the Barrier of Scientistic Belief*; Sherwood Sugden; La Salle, IL.

Few theologians have influenced the spiritual life of the West as profoundly as the lay physicist Galileo Galilei when he successfully challenged the Church's geocentric world view. Though the Copernican doctrine he championed was originally discovered by a devout Christian, Galileo redefined it within a mechanistic world view which exiled God to the periphery. Shaped in succeeding centuries by thinkers from Descartes to Laplace to Bertrand Russell, this new ideology not only made the place of Deity dubious, it also reduced the human mind and all it apprehends —morality, beauty, truth—to subjective illusion. How, after all, could reason or the soul fit in a universe where all reality was material, kinetic, or mathematical?

But now another lay physicist, Wolfgang Smith, is vigorously challenging the new orthodoxies ushered in by Galileo. Smith regards the scientific revolution initiated by the Tuscan astronomer not as a period of enlightenment and progress, but as a 350 year detour. By repudiating not only the Ptolemaic cosmography but all of the metaphysical traditions informing "the notion of cosmic theophany," modern scientism created insuperable dilemmas. The radical bifurcation of the mental and the material universes has not only made knowledge and meaningful choice seem impossible in everyday life, it has also failed the test of scientific application in recent years. Clearly, the arguments for returning to the central premises of Christian thought are compelling, though it is ironic that now only laymen like Smith seem to care. While professional philosophers are busy playing with semiotics and theologians are distributing political manifestos and automatic weapons, it is left to an amateur—a mathematician—to defend the foundations of Western thought.

Inevitably the amateurism shows. In outlining and defending his position, Smith is too eager to confound all foes: Newtonianism, Darwinism, Freudianism, Jungianism, and humanism all receive their lashes in turn. But Smith has taken on too many opponents to understand them all well. Especially weak are the links he posits between key figures. Newton, after all, despised Descartes and all other mechanists, and most Victorians viewed Darwinism not as an outgrowth but as a repudiation of the Newtonian outlook. Good metaphysics should help us make more careful distinctions. But overzealousness draws Smith away from his invincible first principles into fruitless quibbles over minor points—Darwinian interpretations of fetal whale teeth, Freud's views on female urination, or Jung's dreams about dwarfs. Anyone who wants to restore man to a place "a little lower than the angels" might spend less time wrestling in the mud with fossil-hunters and psychoanalysts. cc

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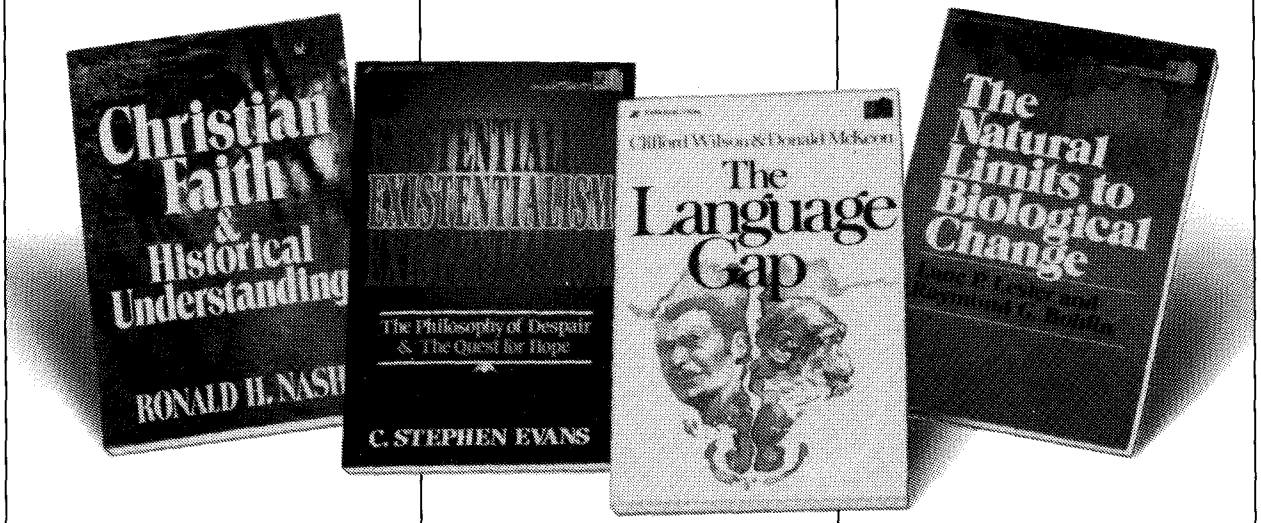
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SCREEN

Noble Savagery

by Herbert London

***The Emerald Forest*; Written by Rospo Pallenberg; Produced and Directed by John Boorman; Embassy Pictures.**

The Emerald Forest was often discussed as the surprise film of the summer season. It is certainly that and perhaps more. Although Mr. Pallenberg's tribute to pristine nature suggests that yet another environmental evangelist walks the corridors of a Hollywood studio, the sheer visual beauty, exacting detail, and anthropological authenticity give this film a majesty rarely found in contemporary movies.

The plot, said to be based on a true story, is centered around the kidnapping of a young boy by an Amazonian tribe known as the Invisible People. The boy's father searches 10 years until he finds his son living and acculturated among the indigenes. In one sense, the film is a stale rehearsal of Nature striving to retain her dignity and innocence against the encroachment of Civilization. Technological advancement may be inexorable, but in this fable the ancient gods triumph. The chief of the Invisible People calls modernization "the end of the world." But where the world ends and where it begins is epiphenomenal, a condition determined by the eye of the beholder.

Nonetheless, the story is an insignificant backdrop for the Amazonian forest. Every detail of this lush forest presented in the film has the hint of verisimilitude. I watched each scene with perspiration on my brow even though I sat in an air-conditioned theater. The humidity in the Amazon montage is palpable. Each tribal ritual appears as a living page in an anthropology text.

John Boorman is a director whose films—as *Deliverance* indicates—are on the "edge," that point where norms and convention yield to instinct and survival. In the hands of a less-skilled director, this film could have been either *Tarzan* or a *National Geographic* travelogue. Had Boorman resisted the temptation to make this a moral tale in which the life of the indigenes is apotheosized, he would have made a startlingly great film. As it is, this is a good but flawed film.

So far has pop anthropology moved in the direction of rationalizing and admiring primitive practices, that the word "primitive" has long since been relegated to desuetude. Claude Levi-Strauss and Clifford Geertz, among others, remind us that there are many ways to adjust to the demands of life. However, from a Darwinian standpoint it is obvious that primitive—I have no hesitation in employing the word—cultures cannot survive in a world dominated by advanced technology. As this film demonstrates, spears are no match for automatic weapons. One may lament the loss of these ancient communities, but lamentation won't bring them back to life.

My concern with Boorman's infatuation with primitives is less significant than my despair over the depiction of modern life. Urbanization is seen as morally bankrupt; exploitation reigns. Young women from the forest are sold into prostitution, and Indians are "civilized" with alcohol and guns. This stereotype is so pervasive in film that it is one of those "truths" rarely examined. The film might have paid more attention to ritual murder, drug-induced hallucinations, self-mutilation, and the proximity of death that characterize much of tribal life. The evolution from primitive to modern man did indeed involve the loss of innocence; it also involved a well-being tribal man never envisioned. This technological shift took mankind from a reliance on nature—its whims and fury—and gave it a Promethean control over the unpredictable life forces—a theme no longer fashionable with directors.

The Emerald Forest is a paean to another way of life; the Stone Age reappears in the adult version of *The Flintstones*. Yet as blatantly moralistic and silly as this film may be, it is gripping. We enter this cinematic jungle as in a dream, swept away by imagery of dark impulses, animal urges, and a serenity of the primordial in all its nakedness. But afterwards, in the sweet glow of city lights, we take comfort in our safe modernity, in a pleasure and security the wilderness can never provide. Even if the jungle largely disappears, it will survive as fable to entrance our children yet to be, if only in *The Emerald Forest*. cc

Herbert London is dean of the Gallatin Division of New York University.

ART

The Sumptuous Basket

by Shehbaz H. Safrani

In New York City there is a room for wonder. Each year, for the past decade and more, the exhibitions held in this small room have left viewers in awe. The extraordinary quality of these shows devoted to the art of China makes a visit to China Institute worthwhile at any time of the year, but particularly during one of its exhibitions.

Founded in 1926 as an apolitical nonprofit organization, China Institute in America maintains a China House in New York City, in which is found the fabulous exhibition room. This town house is a gift of Henry R. Luce, who donated it in 1945 as a memorial to his father, Dr. Henry Winters Luce, a missionary in China. From its inception, China Institute in America has sought to promote better understanding between the American and Chinese peoples. The aim, in the words of Henry R. Luce, "is that of discovering their [Chinese] greatness,

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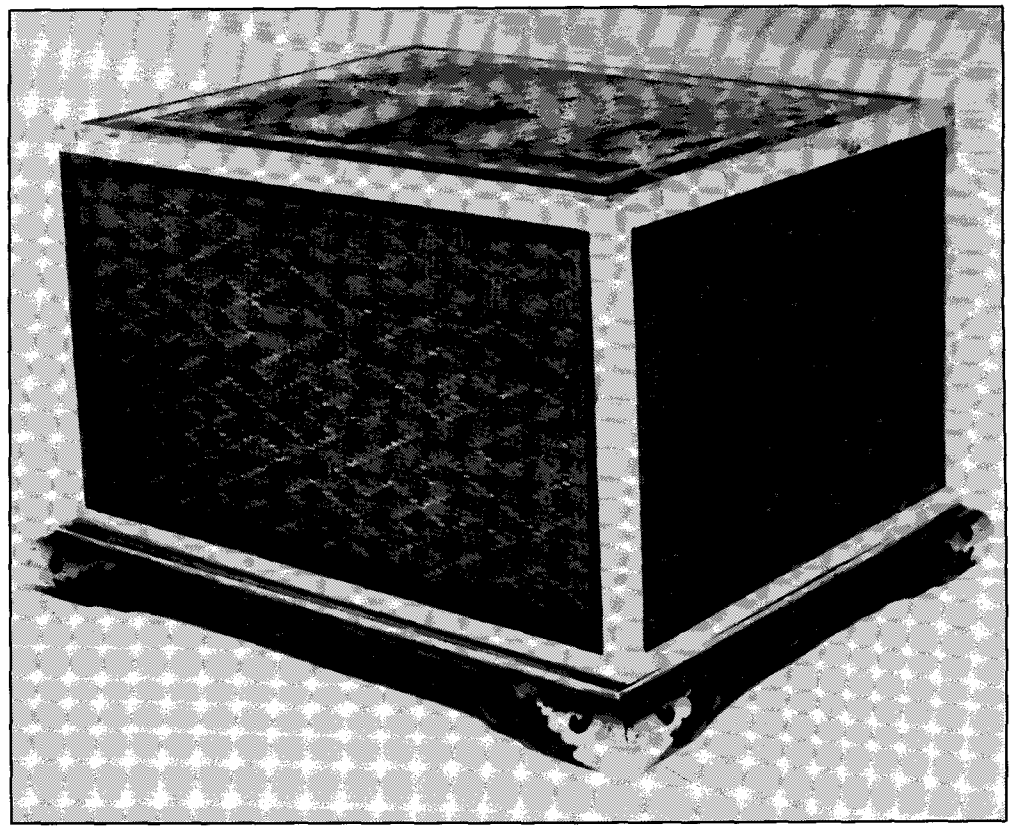
and trying to interpret the West to the East, and the East to the West."

Biannually, the China House features an exhibition organized by a guest curator on a specific aspect of Chinese art, complete with a fully illustrated catalogue. Virtually all China House exhibitions are distinguished: the roster of guest curators reads like a Who's Who in the world of art. No matter what the scope and ambition of a guest curator may be, the works of art are displayed in just one small room (20' x 20') with a single door. The walls contain glass cabinets that stand on a uniform dark base, waist high, putting all the artworks at eye-level but imposing limits on how much can be shown. Despite these cramped quarters, I have never felt that the art objects have been displayed in what the Victorians termed "organized clutter." The best of all aspirations, it seems to me, has been followed at China House. Entrance is free, with inexpensive catalogues published on a shoestring budget, offering the finest of Chinese art in an extremely simple setting. In fact, no attempt has been made to create the least element of atmosphere: the tiny staff of China House does no more than change the background in the glass cases, usually a different color for each show. For smaller works of art, tiny cubes and raised areas are similarly covered with the same monochrome fabric as the interior of the glass cases. Perhaps small and large institutions, as well as universities, ought to send a scout to any one of the China House exhibitions and emulate them. Just as the artistry of the Old Masters has inspired many imitators, I see no reason why the brilliance achieved by the China House in managing and curating consistently first-rate shows should not be duplicated elsewhere in America.

Which brings us to *The Sumptuous Basket*, an exhibition of Chinese lacquer on basketry panels, shown at China House from March 30 to June 3. The idea for this show of 33 objects originated with Laurence Sickman, Director Emeritus of The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas. James C. Y. Watt, Curator of Asiatic Art, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, was the guest curator. Most of the lacquer pieces came from eminent



Rectangular box with white brass inlay and frame. First half of 17th century, late Ming. 15.8 cm × 12.3 cm × 9.4 cm. Photograph courtesy China Institute of America.

American museums, but some came from leading American dealers in Chinese art (like Alice Boney and Richard H. Ellsworth, both of New York City), and others from the Museum for Far Eastern Antiquities, Stockholm. But all of the pieces gathered from these sources revealed the mastery of Chinese lacquer artists in creating beautiful basketry panels.

At the opening of *The Sumptuous Basket* show, I talked with James Watt, the guest curator. "Lacquer," he told me, "is a natural plastic. It is resistant to everything." The effects of extremes of temperature—such as those experienced in Paris and New York City apartments, for instance—are too well-known among restorers. Collectors of art tend to forget about the damage caused by hot, dry interiors in winter and by humid ones in summer. The toll on fine French furniture from the age of the three Louis to that of the two Napoleons, in just these two cities alone, has been terrible. "Lacquer does crack in extremely dry conditions," Mr. Watt observed, "otherwise it will last forever." Because of inadequate care, very few Coromandel screens—delightful in interiors and darlings of contemporary American decorators—have been preserved. "Most of the damages to Chinese lacquer," Mr. Watt emphasized, "occurred within the last century, particularly within the last few decades." Only London and the famed country houses of the English have been immune because they are, as many visitors know, notoriously unheated. In the manner of the nursery rhyme Pussy Cat, cognoscenti of Chinese lacquer head for London, still a gold mine for these works of art.

With the introduction of paper bags and now plastic ones, even the most rugged of shoppers in contemporary America rarely thinks of using baskets. The chic prefer brand names and tags —Gucci, Pucchi, Tucci—to woven baskets of any kind, including sumptuous sorts. I have discovered that besides serious connoisseurs of art, those Americans most likely to appreciate the intricacy in basket art are dentists, surgeons, and other professionals who rely on their hands. Many other Americans do not fully appreciate the kind of work on display in *The Sump-*

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tuous Basket because the artistry is to be seen in decorative surfaces rather than in art objects *per se*.

Still, the tradition of lacquering baskets is very much alive in Burma. Elsewhere—in China and in places where Chinese have settled in recent years—their manual talents have attracted them to assembly-line work, while smaller numbers have prospered as professional artists. Fads in America and the West can have crippling effects upon Asian craftsmen, though. With rising demand for any craft, the number of craftsmen swells. Sadly, decline in these crafts is rapid when there is little or no demand. Consequently, when Chinese Coromandel screens of at least a century old are auctioned in New York City, they often command as much as $30,000 each. The highest price on record is a quarter of a million dollars for a 17th-century Coromandel screen. Yet, the average contemporary Coromandel screen can be had in Hong Kong for less than $10,000. But the antique and the contemporary Coromandel screens are essentially similar—normally nine feet high, 20 inches wide, and consist of 12 decorated panels. Aesthetes and philistines alike agree that a Coromandel screen transforms any interior.

Of the 33 works of lacquer basketry recently shown at China House, James Watt singled out a late-16th-century Ming example as his favorite. "It is such a rich piece," he explained, "reflecting material prosperity in an area which was particularly prosperous." The piece Mr. Watt found so satisfying was a rectangular tray with painted decoration and mother-of-pearl inlay. It was no longer than an average arm, elbow to palm, and no wider. The enchantment of this Ming tray owed to its tremendous range of colors, all exceedingly subtle, modest but timeless in their beauty. Augmented with mother-of-pearl, these colors had the effect upon my eyes that Borges fiction has upon my mind. Contemplating this work inspired a feeling of elevation and pride in human creativity, an assurance that for all the darkness created by some men, there are others who can please many by the excellence of their art. What this Ming tray depicted was a natural setting in which two gentlemen (on the inside of the tray) dressed in black and red are seated at a red lacquer table, eating and drinking. It is the sort of setting, simple yet so inspiring in its tranquillity, about which writers like Somerset Maugham and our own James Michener could have written a fine account. Once, inspired by a Coromandel screen, Maugham did in fact write about it, and one of the finest books on Ukiyo-e, *Japanese Prints: From the Early Masters to the Modern*, is by Mr. Michener.

Lacquer basketry in China had Neolithic origins, although most of the pieces shown at China House date from the late Ming (1368-1644) and the Qing (1644-1911) dynasties. These cherished possessions of today once served as containers of grain and satisfied quotidian needs of the Chinese. Four basic techniques—all very old—may be seen in Chinese basket-weaving: twill, twill and wrap, twine, and checker. Twill was the most commonly used of the four.

Bamboo, because of its abundance and its wide use, has always seemed to me a most democratic medium, unlike, say, bronze. Chinese made remarkable use of both bronze and bamboo, but baskets remained central to Chinese material culture. And in their zeal for keeping records, the Chinese naturally scrutinized their basketry. Published in the early 17th century, *Sancai tuhui, Illustrated Encyclopaedia of the Three Realms* (Heaven, Earth, and Man), covers all phases of Chinese basketry chronologically, complete with illustrations. According to Mr. Watt, the guest curator, use of lacquer on basketry began in earnest only in the Eastern Han period (25-220 A.D.). But some accomplished lacquer basketry comes from the kingdom of Chu, in South China, during the Warring States era (475-221 B.C.). Later, lacquer basketry flourished in the Jiangnan region at the time of the Southern Song (1127-1279) and along the southeastern coastal provinces of China under the late Ming (1368-1644) and early Qing (1644-1911) dynasties.

Mr. Watt also pointed out that during the Ming dynasty, Chinese artists first developed a lacquerware "in which exposed basketry panels woven of very fine bamboo strips were part of the decorated surface of lacquered articles constructed out of bamboo or partly of wood." It is this type of lacquerwork, from which the 33 examples were selected for exhibition at China House, that Mr. Watt discusses at length in his catalogue (*The Sumptuous Basket*, $15 plus $2 for postage from China Institute in America, 125 East 65th Street, New York, NY 10021, (212) 744-8181).

Outside of Chinese art, it is unusual to find objects of daily use that are so artistically enjoyable. An aunt whom I love once had a myna bird. As a child, I was asked to catch crickets for the bird to eat. I abhorred the task, partly because we had no containers to feed the insects live to our myna bird. I learned from reading Mr. Watt's catalogue that in 13th-century China, cricket cages of silver basketry were used in the region of modern Hangzhou, a provincial capital of Zhejiang. And so in a room for wonder I was reminded of a myna bird. The recollection was perhaps insignificant, but the beauty of China's art is meant to revive and enrich the memories of everyday life. cc

Shehbaz Safrani is a writer and painter based in New York City.

BOOKS IN BRIEF

The Conservative Revolution in America **by Guy Sorman; Regnery; Chicago.** The French perspective is provocative, but an index would have been helpful to buyers anxious to locate "the good parts"—i.e., the sections about them and their friends.

Wintering **by Diana Kappel-Smith; Little, Brown; Boston; $15.95.** A winter spent with deer, owls, hares, and hardy farmers in the Green Mountains of Vermont.

William Morris and the Middle Ages; **edited by Joanna Banham and Jennifer Harris; Manchester University Press; Manchester, England.** A catalogue of artwork—including beautiful color plates—and essays reminding us of the creative powers of a Victorian whose socialism owed more to the splendors of medievalism than to the economic theories of his contemporaries.

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Letter From Washington

by Samuel T. Francis

To the Pretoria Station

Governments, Lenin once wrote, never fall unless they are first pushed. Whatever his faults, the old Bolshevik must have known something about how to get rid of unwanted regimes. In the Revolution of 1917, it was the Imperial German government that helped to push over what was left of the Russian state by dispatching Lenin and his friends from Swiss exile to St. Petersburg on the famous "sealed train." In the case of South Africa, the government of the United States is about to play a similar role.

In June and July, the U.S. Congress, against the wishes of the Reagan Administration, imposed economic sanctions on South Africa as an "incentive" to end apartheid. Those sanctions passed by the House were pretty stringent; those from the Senate, less so; but the differences will be adjudicated in conference between the two chambers, and the President probably will not veto the final bill. The enactment of these sanctions against a friendly country with which we transact a multimillion-dollar business, the government of which has generally supported the more controversial parts of our foreign policy and which has never harmed any American citizen, sets in motion a process that may well end in the destruction of the most civilized society on the African continent.

The violent agitation within South Africa is largely under the control of the Communist-dominated African National Congress and its front groups and agents. The Communists and their fellow travelers also play a significant role in mobilizing the anti-apartheid movement in the United States. Indeed, it is fair to say that the Communists and the extreme left set the pace of this movement. Of course, many of them are not smart enough to be real Communists. Recently, Mayor Barry of Washington proposed that the name of Massachusetts Avenue, where the South African Embassy is located, be changed to "Nelson Mandela Avenue," after the Marxist revolutionary who is now serving a life sentence in South Africa for his role in a Communist-organized terrorist conspiracy of the 1960's. What the Communists and revolutionaries want is not "freedom" but the destruction of South African society and the imposition of their own tyrannical power.

Non-Communist elements predominate numerically in the anti-apartheid movement, and their motives are mixed. The puddingheads who arrange to have themselves arrested in front of the South African Embassy every day, while partly fascinated by the word "Liberation," are really more concerned to revive the civil rights movement as the base of a viable left-wing political coalition, something Jesse Jackson conspicuously failed to do in the last election. Then there are the establishment liberals who support sanctions on South Africa because they cannot operate in their social and political milieu without supporting them. Finally, there are moderates and some conservatives who, having committed themselves to the position that it is the proper business of the United States to foster democracy and free enterprise everywhere in the world, lack a firm philosophical basis for resisting the arguments against South Africa. It is not uncommon to hear such people claim that there is no difference between South Africa and the Soviet Union, for example, though few are courageous enough to propose serious sanctions against the Soviets and none have the cultural power to lead a mass movement for such sanctions.

The vanguard of the anti-apartheid movement, then, consists of the revolutionary left, and it is from the far left that the demand for sanctions originated. The left will not be satisfied with measures that only "make a statement"; it wants sanctions that will cripple and destabilize the South African economy and government, and it will keep demanding such sanctions until they are passed. And who in the anti-apartheid coalition will resist their demands? Little Stevie Wonder, who accepted his 1985 Oscar in the name of Nelson Mandela? Jesse Jackson, one of whose top advisers is himself a former member of the Communist Party and a present member of the World Peace Council? Or perhaps the establishment liberals, who even now are inventing excuses for not helping anti-Communist forces in Asia, Africa, and Latin America? When, in their overextended and miserable careers, have these people ever resisted Communism effectively?

Nor will the moderates who supported the sanctions on South Africa provide an effective brake on the far left. Their foreign policy is based on the dubious premise that the United States must officially punish countries that do not conform to our institutions and traditions (and their interpretation of our institutions and traditions is itself dubious). Their feeble argument against tougher sanctions is simply that they would harm South African Blacks, just as their argument for aid to the Nicaraguan contras is that the Sandinistas are not good for democracy in Nicaragua. The national interest of the United States does not appear to be a significant element in their world view, and the soft sanctions legislation that they guided through the Senate contain provisions for harder measures if there is insufficient progress by the South Africans in ending "apartheid," which is not precisely defined in the bill.

In South Africa itself, reforms undertaken by the ruling National Party in the last few years have gone far to dismantle apartheid, a term that is seldom used there today. Naïfs in

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South Africa thought these reforms would satisfy "legitimate" Black demands and undercut the appeal of the far left. In fact, the reforms have simply raised expectations of further reforms that cannot realistically or immediately be granted and have played into the hands of the violent left. Everyone knows what happens when unrealistic expectations are raised. As Daniel Bell puts it, writing of the civil rights movement in the United States:

> The classic illustration of the trajectory of expectations, first laid down by de Tocqueville and repeated tediously since then by social scientists, tells us that no society which promises justice and, having admitted the legitimacy of the claims, slowly begins to open the way, can then expect to ride out the whirlwind in a comfortable fashion.

The irony of the sanctions is that, intended by their moderate sponsors to accelerate the abandonment of apartheid, they will, in fact, frustrate expectations even more, if their effect is to lower Black living standards and encourage more violence and discontent. This, in turn, will help the left in South Africa and offer an opportunity for its American comrades to press for tougher sanctions in the United States. There is no part of the anti-apartheid coalition that can or will resist the concerted imperatives of the far left. None of the other components of this movement has the will or the principles to resist effectively, and once the premise that we should enact sanctions against apartheid is granted, there is no logical stopping place on the long march to revolution. America may not provide a sealed train for the revolutionaries, but it is certainly helping to build the track on which the train will travel. cc

Samuel Francis is on the staff of Senator John P. East. His most recent book is Power and History *(University Press of America).*

REVISIONS

The Adulteries of Art

Edward Banfield cannot seem to stay out of trouble. When he suggested (in *The Unheavenly City*) that the problems of urban Blacks were not so much the result of discrimination as their socioeconomic class, he was branded a racist and virtually hounded out of his chair at Penn. More recently he is being called a philistine for his gentle proposal that the government has no business funding the arts.

In *The Democratic Muse: Visual Arts and the Public Interest* (Basic Books; New York) Banfield makes a compelling case that the arts do not serve the public interest in a manner that entitles them to public support. What is more, all this funding, teaching, and collecting of *objets* distorts the true purpose and function of the arts, which Banfield conceives of as a sort of aesthetic entertainment. Banfield may not know much about art, but he knows what he doesn't like: the precious snobbery of collectors, curators, and art historians who turn what might have been a pleasure into a ritual of acquisition and a cult of the original.

The worst abuses in public arts policies are found, inevitably, at the Federal level, especially at the National Endowment for the Arts. The idea of a national foundation was already kicking around Washington in the 1950's. It was only a matter of time before it was picked up by the well-schooled and well-heeled groupies that clustered around Jack Kennedy. Like most of Kennedy's more damaging notions, it took the heavy hand of LBJ to make it a reality.

Why should tax money support the visual arts? Banfield is at some pains to document the answers: it will improve our image abroad, it will enrich our lives, and—here's the best—it will ease tensions in the inner cities (which obviously explain why our cities are so free of crime). It must be said that Adam Clayton Powell, who supported the idea of the NEA, didn't buy that argument. About the only prominent politician to question the constitutionality of arts funding was Strom Thurmond, when he was young enough to be reactionary.

In other countries, at other times, Banfield's arguments might not apply (Athens in the age of Pericles, Constantinople in the reign of Justinian), but in America we used to have a fairly limited idea of what government could do. Perhaps it was not the best idea, but—as he concludes—the principle of limited government "has made America what it is." The past 30 years (at least) have given us a taste of what sort of America the managers, artists, and intellectuals would use our money to create. Frankly, most of us could find a more harmless way of wasting our money. cc

Letter From College

by T. Harvey Holt

The much-ballyhooed young conservative movement of the early 1980's may soon come to an inglorious and grinding halt. While the early 80's were marked by a certain gusto on the part of conservatives fighting to overthrow entrenched liberals, the middle 80's are a time of unwarranted complacency. One can almost hear cries of "Reagan is in and all's well!" throughout the land. But the hard fact is that while we have a conservative White House, the Congress (not to mention most state houses) is still in the hands of the old establishment.

This unwarranted complacency, what I call "unsecure security," has its most devastating effects on college campuses, the breeding ground of activism. Those who started the latest wave of campus conservatism, the people who founded at least 70 conservative newspapers and hundreds of conservative forum groups in the early 1980's, have all since graduated. They are no longer around to guide and rally their campus troops. The new campus leaders were just entering high school when Ronald Reagan was first elected

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President. Their memories are of the Reagan Honeymoon and the pitiful administration of Jimmy Carter that preceded it. George McGovern, Vietnam, and Watergate are only vague memories, and a serious liberal opposition is no more real than the bogeyman.

Complacency has become evident even among such bastions of attention-grabbing outrageousness as *The Dartmouth Review*. Gone are the days of mangled "Mr. Bill" and burning cross cover photos. A typical issue now sports a portrait of an administrator or athlete on the cover. At my own alma mater, *The Northwestern Review* has—of all things—moved more toward the center in search of more staff; a recent issue carried a feature on one Professor Robert Eisner, devoted Keynesian, calling him "one of Northwestern's greatest assets." Such praise of a professor who tells students that "inflation doesn't matter" would have been anathema to the old guard at the *Review*, and indeed raised considerable criticism from the right when it was published. The long-fought battle to return the American flag to the Northwestern campus (in which we chalked up a victory last year) would probably not occur now, in the age of complacency.

The new generation seems to regard the old battling and point-making as eccentric or even undignified. They fail to recognize that such things are occasionally necessary to sustain interest in a campus conservative organization—the element of boisterousness needed to inspire the team in a serious game.

If any institution has encouraged a return to business as usual, it is the Republican Party, which never altered from its staid, slightly right-of-center course. This became painfully apparent during the 1984 primary season, when conservative Congressman Tom Corcoran challenged Republican Senator Charles Percy. When Northwestern Republicans organized 47 workers for the local Republican organization, the Evanston (where NU is located) chairman made it clear that these eager young people were distinctly unwelcome. As it happened, about two-thirds of them were conservatives, and the erstwhile chairman was skittish of the possibility of having a Percy en-

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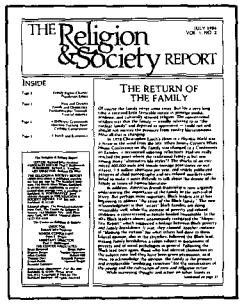
THE Religion & Society REPORT
INSIDE
THE RETURN OF THE FAMILY

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NEW EDITIONS

The African Queen by C. S. Forester; Little, Brown; Boston; $6.95. A fairer and more tragic novel than the classic John Huston film based on it. The Germans are less evil, Allnutt more of a cockney, the ending less happy—all of which make for a mature adventure thriller worth a second reading. Little, Brown is also reprinting Forester's Hornblower saga which so many of us started reading as boys and found ourselves, before we were through, growing into men. Once again, life imitates art.

Under the Volcano by Malcolm Lowry with introduction by Stephen Spender; Harper & Row; New York; $15.95. Lowry's masterful portrayal of alcoholism will survive even Spender's litsy introduction. It is the exception that proves the rule (all stream-of-consciousness novels are boring), because Lowry knew what he was doing in following the example of Conrad Aiken rather than James Joyce. *Under the Volcano*, a self-portrait of an entire nation (British), class (upper), and culture (liberal) in the process of committing suicide, produced one more anomaly: a boring movie version by John Huston.

Jonathan Swift; edited by Angus Ross and David Wooley; Oxford University Press. A splendid helping of savage indignation in the Oxford Authors series, this volume includes *A Tale of a Tub, The Battle of the Books*, as well as a good selection of poetry and letters. The notes and glossary are more than usually helpful—and necessary in these degenerate times. The Johnson volume in the same series is a worthy companion.

A Little Learning by Evelyn Waugh; Little, Brown; Boston; $14.95. The first and only volume of Waugh's uncompleted autobiography, concluding with a memorable account of a failed suicide: "Then I climbed the sharp hill that led to all the years ahead." Little, Brown has also reissued, in addition to most of the novels, a collection of travel pieces—many of them hilarious—*When the Going Was Good*.

dorsement bungled. The rules were changed at the last minute to deny the Northwesterners membership, and 47 workers were sent back to campus, along with an admonition that students ought to vote at home, instead of the place where they spend about 10 months of the year.

Those who worked on the campus Reagan-Bush campaign were a distinctly timid and complacent bunch, signing up more in order to say they had worked for Reagan-Bush than for any real activism, or so it seemed. When Geraldine Ferraro made a campaign stop at Northwestern, a group of peaceful "Fritz-Busters" was organized for the event, but not by the Reagan-Bush crowd—the Conservative Council arrived nearly 100 strong. Reagan-Bush types were noticeably absent.

The picture is not entirely bleak, in spite of a currently meek generation of conservatives on campus. There now exists an unprecedented conservative infrastructure for campus activists. The Leadership Institute, Institute for Educational Affairs, National Journalism Center, and many other fine organizations are working hard to sustain the campus conservative movement and to place conservatives in positions that matter (politically) after graduation.

Dartmouth Review alumni are now spread about media and public policy circles. Co-founder Gregory Fossedal now writes for the *Wall Street Journal* editorial page, and Dinesh D'Souza and Benjamin Hart are now at the Heritage Foundation. Albert Veldhuyzen, who was a driving force in building the Northwestern Conservative Council, is now with the Leadership Institute. There are a number of others who have graduated to similar positions.

But the danger remains. The days of hapless Carter-Mondale Democrats are gone. The left learned a hard lesson in 1984 and is reorganizing into a force that must be taken seriously once again. Conservative complacency, unsecure security, will invite defeat.

If the stage was set in the early 80's, the real show will play out in the late 80's. The future beyond Reagan is a question. Whether the gist of the answer is positive or negative for conservatism depends a great deal upon whether or not a successful leadership transition and subsequent revitalization of the conservative movement occurs on campuses. cc

T. Harvey Holt is a former publisher of the Northwestern Review *at Northwestern University.*

Letter From the Lower Right

by John Shelton Reed

Tell About the South

Why a monthly letter from the South in a national (indeed, international) publication like this one? A good question that deserves a thoughtful answer.

When Thoreau heard about the construction of a telegraph from Maine to Texas, it's said, he asked whether Maine and Texas had anything to say to one another. He meant, of course, that they were different, mutually incomprehensible worlds. A skeptic today, on the other hand, would probably ask whether they have anything *new* to say to one another. Many people simply assume that the messages emanating from Maine and Texas have become virtually identical.

Obviously, I disagree with both views. I believe that Texas does have something to say to Maine, the South to the rest of the United States. Certainly Texas, and the South, are still different. If you doubt it, a study paid for by your very own tax dollars has recently proved it yet again. Looking at activity level, drinking, obesity, and so forth, the Center for Disease Control turned up—well, let Dr. James Marks of the CDC's epidemiology division tell it: "The main thing we were surprised at," says Dr. Marks, "was the amount of variation from state to state. We expected some, but nowhere near as much."

Good-sized differences still remain in attitudes, values, and beliefs, as well, as I hope to illustrate in this monthly letter. Americans need to be reminded of this. I believe that Southerners are one of those exemplary minorities—like Catholics, like Jews, like Blacks—who ought to be allowed to keep sticking their oar in, reminding their fellow Americans that there are other ways to look at history, other ways to do things in the present, other visions of what the future ought to be like.

There's another species of impatience with the South, exemplified by one of Helen Hokinson's *New Yorker* matrons, standing in a bookstore, saying, "I feel sorry for Mississippi, but I just don't like to read about it." I won't

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ask you, every month, to read about Mississippi. This letter is *from* the South, but it won't by any means always be *about* the South.

And it won't presume either to present "the Southern point of view" on whatever its subject happens to be. The fact is that on many subjects, there's no such thing. And when there is, sometimes I don't share it.

Still, I do believe that most Americans (and nearly all Americans that are worth a damn) reflect in their opinions and even in their beliefs the region they come from. So this monthly letter will doubtless reflect a Southern viewpoint—my Southern viewpoint. If my fellow Southrons don't like it, no doubt they'll make themselves heard.

And that's as explicit as I plan to get about what I'm doing here. Let me tell a story.

Not long ago, some of us went fishing down on the North Carolina coast. The group included my buddy Peter, a recent immigrant from Boston. When we stopped in a general store for provisions, I spied a cap emblazoned with crossed Confederate and U.S. flags and the motto, "American by birth/Southern by the grace of God."

I coveted that cap. (I know it's wrong, but I'm weak.)

When I asked the trailer-camp mama behind the counter how much it cost, Peter (who, as a matter of fact, was wearing a New York Yankees' baseball cap) started giving me a hard time: "No *real* Southerner would wear one of those things. Nobody but a deracinated, self-conscious, effete" —and so forth.

The woman at the register gave the Flatbush Flash a pitying look. "Honey, she said, "a real Southerner will wear any damn hat he wants to."

* * *

From Alabama in early July came word of the acquittal of the "Marion Three," Black political leaders who had been charged with ballot-tampering. This must have been a disappointment not only to the Justice Department, which brought the case, but also to those liberals who longed for a replay of the glory days of the Civil Rights Movement, if not of the Scottsboro case. On the other hand, it was clearly a relief both to the defendants and to many other Black Alabamians who, after all, have had no very good reason to trust the good intentions of white electoral officials.

Frankly, Alabama strikes me as an unlikely place, and this case an unlikely way, to begin to clean up the electoral system. But the situation that gave rise to the indictments clearly wasn't what Thomas Jefferson had in mind.

"You can't win an election in the Black Belt of Alabama if you don't have a sophisticated get-out-the-absentee vote effort," one organizer told a Southern Regional Council reporter. What that means in practice is that campaign workers locate potential voters among rural Blacks, often illiterate, sometimes old and infirm. They help them register, get absentee ballots for them, and "assist" them in filling out the ballots. It's the sort of practice that would pass unremarked (and probably does) in Chicago: good old-fashioned American machine politics.

All of this is unquestionably legal —which does not, of course, make it particularly edifying to watch. Nor does it excuse even unintentional violations of the law, and a grand jury

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found grounds to believe the law had been violated (specifically that the ballots had been filled in incorrectly, or altered). But the trial jury decided that there were no such violations.

Now, there's a great deal to be said for literacy tests for voting, but white Alabamians forfeited whatever right they had to say it by their behavior prior to 1965, which was far shabbier than anything the "Marion Three" were even accused of. Still, let's hope that some day every American will be too well-informed, too self-respecting, too proud to let someone else fill out his ballot for him. And, in fairness, those who still reproach Alabama for the sorrier aspects of its past should recognize how much the situation has changed. Who can doubt that 20 years ago a "not guilty" verdict in a case like this would have been unthinkable? "Alabama justice" should no longer be pronounced only with a sneer. cc

John Shelton Reed will deliver the Lamar Lectures at Mercer University in November. His topic is "Social Types of the Modern South: A Field Guide."

CULTURAL REVOLUTIONS

Texas is the latest target for intellectual carpetbaggers and deracinated academics determined to turn the Lone Star State into a literary Sun Belt and Houston into "a new Literary Mecca." Such is the impression left by a recent issue of *The Texas Humanist*, the colorful and provocative magazine of art and ideas produced by the Texas Committee for the Humanities. To be sure, in surveying "The Literary Landscape of Texas," one of the contributors points with pride to the indigenous writers who "live out where the screwworms kill the cows," and another acknowledges the distinctively Southwestern character of past Texas writing, shaped "outside the liberal tradition and . . . loosely based on the survival codes of Southern Baptist theology, on ranching and farming, on cults of manhood and womanhood, and on a stern frontier pragmatism." Like most regional movements, Texas literature relies on a growing number of small presses and literary magazines. "It is quite possible," observes Bryce Milligan, " . . . that a lot of what gets published in New York is inferior to what is appearing from the small presses and independents living and working in Texas."

Unfortunately, the difference between what gets published in New York and what gets published in Texas is shrinking as the state's literary establishment is taken over by highbrow newcomers. Susan Wood, who recently moved from Washington, DC, to become a poetry teacher at Rice University, is very proud of the new Creative Writing Program at the University of Houston, especially since they enticed Donald Barthelme back from New York to join Rosellen Brown and Stanley Plumly on the UH faculty. Wood may be right when she says that there's less of "the narcissism of small differences" in Houston than in New York or Boston or Washington because there's not "a lot of people fighting for a little recognition." But her comparison of Houston's "literary landscape" to "the city's skyline—all those postmodern palaces rising out of the swamp in the blink of an eye" —suggests a prefabricated literature with no sense of tradition. Even more disturbing is Wood's concluding pronouncement: "Houston is not Texas, but near enough." Substitute "New York City" and "America" and we have the familiar perspective of cosmopolitan provincialism.

Houston's creative writing programs are the key to the future. As one writer put it, Houston is a bulwark against the "anti-intellectual heritage" of Texans who seem unable to understand that a writer "in Texas" who can "write about human conditions that apply universally" is more important than "a 'Texas' writer."

What is happening here is explained only too well in an essay—perhaps the best in the magazine—by Don Graham. Graham's not nearly so happy as Wood about Houston's success in luring Barthelme back to the state, since virtually "none of Barthelme's work takes the measure of Texas—though it does do an excellent job of capturing the *frissons* of upper Manhattan." In Barthelme, Graham sees yet another of the "Paleface" writers who want to "rescue Texas writing . . . from its provincial, embarrassing, and nativistic roots," while driving out all of the "Redface" poets and novelists who cherish these origins. For the Paleface, the issues are clear: it's "EAST/Ideas/Sensitivity/Art" vs. "TEXAS/Prejudices/Chauvinism/Art." Graham complains that since Palefaces captured the prize committees of the Texas Institute of Letters, two of the last three top awards have gone to "books that have absolutely nothing to do with Texas: the 1981 winner dealt with bachelor life in New York City; the 1983 winner with the international tennis circuit. Mr. Bachelor had barely touched down at the Houston airport before the prize was his, and Mr. Tennis, who taught in Austin for a while, has lived in Rome the last three years." Meanwhile, observed Graham, "native Texans writing in and of the state . . . languish at Dairy Queens and honky tonks, exiles in their native land." Even Paul Christensen—himself a recent arrival who thinks emigrés from the East can stimulate and broaden Texas literature —admits "there's truth in the complaints" about the region's loss of "its once clear voice of the spirit" and

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about the "attention-grabbing newcomers of both coasts."

Things will probably not get better for Texas literature in the near future. It's too much to hope that universities in Houston, Dallas, and Austin will soon stop hiring their creative writing teachers from New York and California. "Texas" literary prizes will likely continue to be awarded by—and to—despairing young men from Harvard Square. Graham may even be right when he concludes that "in the end they [the Palefaces] nearly always win." There is at least one real Texan left who remembers the Alamo. Graham concludes his critical arguments by posing the Southwest's most abiding literary question: "Where's my shooting iron?" cc

REVISIONS

Between Shakespeare and Sorel

For many centuries the Greek and Latin classics were the only major literary force which united, even defined, the civilized West. Along with theology and mathematics, they virtually *were* the curriculum. Teaching English literature is actually a fairly new idea in England and the U.S. It originated with such late Victorians as Matthew Arnold, who believed that theology could no longer serve as the "queen of the sciences" and that some new integrative discipline would have to be erected in its place. In America, English literature won its place in the schools less because of such explicit secularizing than because of reflexive Anglophilia. But the results were much the same. "In our culture literature has been positioned in much the same place as scripture," writes Robert Scholes in *Textual Power: Literary Theory and the Teaching of English* (Yale University Press; New Haven, CT).

So long as neither the average English teacher nor the average student questioned the foundations of the discipline—so long as they busied themselves with memorizing verse, identifying hidden symbols, scanning lines, and reading Dickens—the sacred new canon did provide a cultural center for the schools. But the new center could not hold. Radical social critics were soon attacking the holy books as the mystifications of class- and gender-bound prejudice and ideologies. Often infected by the skepticism of such radicals, the high priests of the new literary faith—the critics and literary theorists—soon fell to fighting among themselves over the proper rules and methods for interpreting the sacred texts, exposing and undermining the dubious basis for their own social prominence.

But mandatory classes in English continue. Some teachers try to keep up the old pretense of the Arnoldian aestheticism, as though nothing had happened. Many more have instead politicized and ideologized their teaching, turning literature study into an attack upon the very culture it was supposed to sustain. Scholes, a professor of English at Brown University, belongs to this second group. He wants his students to recognize and criticize the cultural codes in literature. For him, this means helping students understand that every text is "partial, its truth value various in relation to historical changes." The teacher should help students seize "a share of textual power for themselves" by challenging the assumptions of the works they read, though this may mean a "voyage of alienation" out of Western values or even a "challenge [to] the position of literary art itself." Naturally, the literature teacher must never presume to "settle the rightness or wrongness of these individual acts of criticism," but should merely "interact . . . negotiate, and . . . make available the critical positions already on record."

Scholes is not as theory-mad as some of his colleagues—but then neither is he as consistent. Even after he demonstrates the absurdity of many of deconstructionism's central doctrines, he argues that we must "salvage" those other features of deconstruction that help "feminists and other socially committed writers to obtain textual power over their worlds." In one chapter he reminds us that—contrary to the latest semiotic thinking—there *is* a discernible real world outside of and larger than language, but in the next chapter he justifies the use of a purely verbal science-fiction world of hermaphrodites to challenge the legitimacy of the extant world of heterosexuals. Scholes detects the totalitarian danger in making the meaning of a text depend solely upon an "interpretive community"; yet in looking for some Archimedean point, "a place to stand from which we can finally see the earth and perhaps even move it," he finds only "class interests." The theoretical "middle ground" Scholes says he wants to occupy turns into a swamp of contradictions.

If there is a way out it lies in a more thoroughgoing critique of the semiotic doctrine of the infinite circulation of texts than Scholes offers. To correct the belief that "signification is an endless network, linking sign to sign," it is not enough to "rescue the referent" by rediscovering the nonlinguistic world of phenomena. We must also remember that human history and "textuality" are *not* infinite or endless; both have a beginning, and both will have an end. All meaning—including that encoded in literature—lies suspended from these endpoints. Since science still tells us nothing about the origins of language, perhaps we should wonder again with Plato and the Apostle John if all translucent human words do not lead us finally back to some self-existent and opaque Word, if all poems are only echoes of some divine Poem. If we think this way very long, we may soon join T.S. Eliot in calling for a return to the old humane learning—theology and classics—on which we built our entire culture. That would require a *real* "journey of alienation."

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Winning tax support for the arts is never easy. The approach recently taken by Jocelyn Levi Straus, chairman of the Texas Commission on the Arts, was to employ research consultants to determine how much money was generated by the arts industry. The consultants' study concluded that the statewide direct impact of the arts is at least 1.7 billion dollars annually. "The bottom line," writes Ms. Straus, "is that now we have data to *prove* that the arts feed the economy as well as the soul."

Professor Galbraith, in his usual brilliant way, goes beyond statistical trifles in his economic advocacy for the arts. In the July/August *American Theatre*, Galbraith not only comes out for a "trickle-down effect" (high prices on Picasso help unknown artists), but he even suggests that Italy's traditions of artistic taste were directly responsible for her industrial achievement. Since Italian economic industrial growth cannot be explained by superior science and engineering, effective government, or "the discipline and cooperativeness of the Italian unions," this only leaves Italian design, "which reflects the superb commitment of Italy to artistic excellence."

The conclusions are obvious. Don't bail out Chrysler, but support "the small nonbureaucratic firm"—he can't quite say entrepreneur—of the artist. This is all very well. But if, as Galbraith suggests, "beautiful is small," don't we owe it to the artist *not* to destroy his independence with government patronage? cc

If the literary spirit is alive in America, you will find it kicking only in the books and journals published by small presses in some of the unlikeliest places. Much of it is either too repellent or too limited in appeal to be published by a mainstream press. You can find entire journals devoted to Black lesbians or Chicano surrealists—but at their best, the small presses represent a rebellion against a literary marketplace that can stomach Michael Korda as an authority on anything apart from bad taste.

For many years, Morty Sklar's Spirit That Moves Us Press has been collecting kudos. At one time or another, Sklar has printed a remarkable set of poets and fiction writers, including Jaroslav Seifert (Nobel laureate 1984), Marge Piercy, Richard Kostelanetz, and W. P. Kinsella—as well as dozens of less-well-known literary lights. What distinguishes Sklar's efforts is not so much the quality of his taste as a commitment to a certain vision of literature as an affair of the spirit. As he observes in the introduction to *The Spirit That Moves Us Reader*, his editorial judgments are far from objective. "Basically what I like to see is work which expresses concern for life and living, and which is skillfully put together." But more than that, he looks for a quality in his contributors which he can only describe as "a love relationship."

Speaking frankly, not everything Sklar publishes is quite to our taste; a good deal of it is not. Perhaps the best verse is translations—Osip Mandelstam, Anna Akhmatova, Lars Lundkvist. To a great extent, the Spirit That Moves Us is a holdover from the Beat mentality of the 50's. It celebrates life, the here and now, the particular instead of the general, and while these concerns may seem trivial *sub specie aeternitatis*, they come as something of a relief in the 1980's—not exactly rain in the desert, more like enough dew to get your lips wet. The Spirit That Moves Us Press; P.O. Box 1585; Iowa City, IA 52244. cc

TYPEFACES

Writing Without Letters

Whatever happened to the old middle-to-highbrow American culture? Once upon a time, there was a fair-sized literate class that kept up on fiction and verse by reading the great organs of literary opinion. These days there is a great gulf between serious literature and general-interest journalism. "Literary" magazines—*Kenyon Review*, *Daedelus*, or *Sewanee Review*, for instance—now constitute a small and isolated province, inhabited by a few thousand English professors and New York intellectuals. Meanwhile, large-circulation magazines such as *Harper's*, *The Atlantic*, or *The Saturday Evening Post* show little interest in *belles lettres*. Oh, *Harper's* still carries an occasional short story (typically a prize winner, published first in some "little magazine"), and we still sometimes find a recent story by John Updike or verse by Marge Piercy in *The Atlantic*. *The Saturday Evening Post* likewise regularly prints a short story by popular writers like Ray Bradbury. And, too, large circulation magazines such as these three generally make space for reviews of one or two serious works of literature in each issue. But everyone knows that Alexander Cockburn's deftly Marxist analysis of the Irish economy in *The Atlantic* or Jeane Kirkpatrick's pronouncements on terrorism in *Harper's* or the profile of Miss America in *The Saturday Evening Post*—these are what the magazines are *really* about. The snatches of

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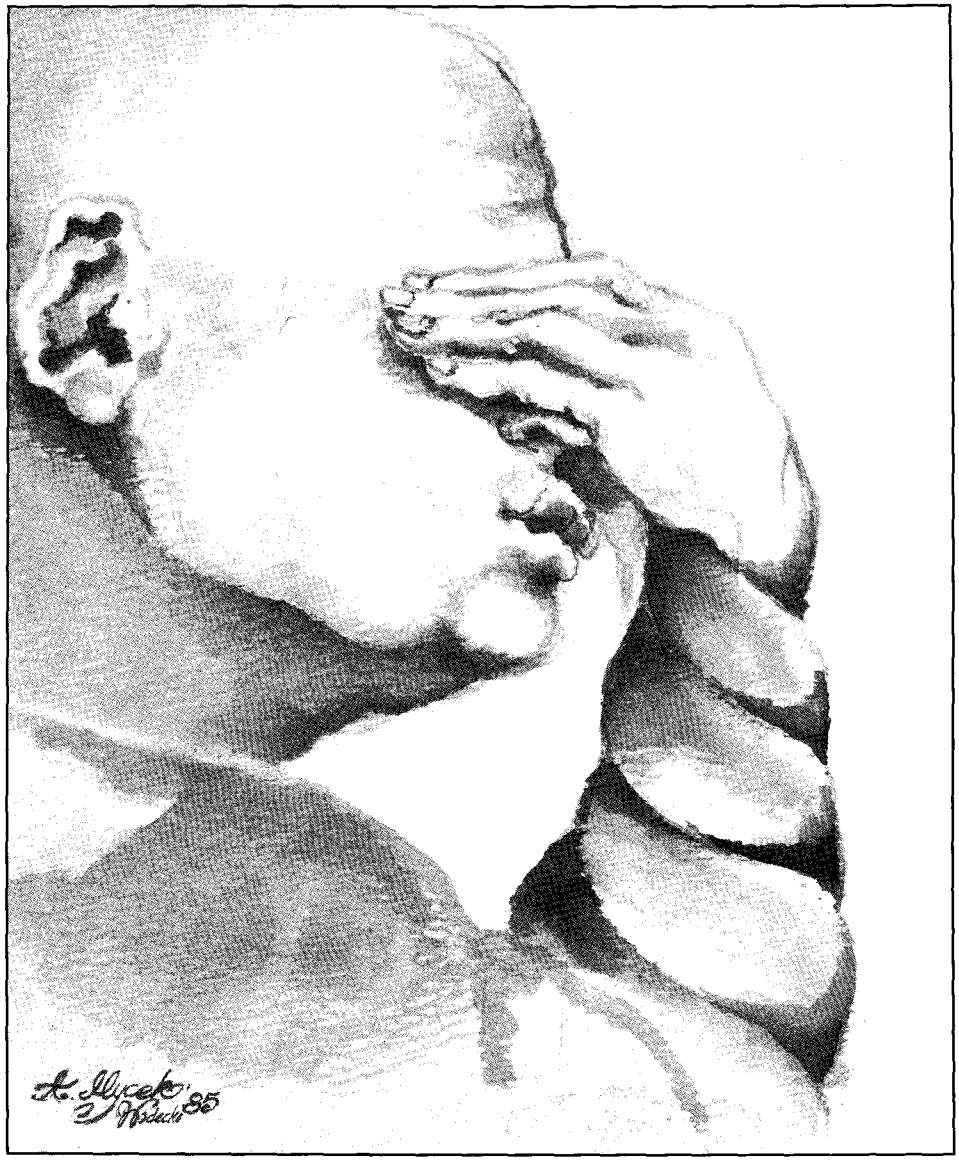
fiction, poetry, and literary criticism are just window dressing, high-toned afterthoughts. *The Atlantic* says it all with a Table of Contents heading: "Humor and Fiction." Literature may be good for a few laughs or help to pass the time at the beach, but today's magazine editors have *serious* business to attend to.

We need not cross the Atlantic and go back to the days of Addison's *Spectator* or Sam Johnson's *Rambler*, of Francis Jeffrey's *Edinburgh Review* and Thackeray's *Cornhill* to find widely read journals serious about literature. We need not even return to Poe's *Southern Literary Messenger*, William Dean Howells's *Atlantic Monthly*, or G. W. Curtis's *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*. In the opening decades of *this* century, America enjoyed a half-dozen large-circulation magazines devoted chiefly to literature, including *Harper's*, *Century*, *The Bookman*, *Scribner's*, and *Saturday Review of Literature*. In the early 1920's, a typical issue of *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, for instance, featured fiction by Conrad Aiken, Wilbur Daniel Steele, or G. K. Chesterton—as well as lesser-known writers. Poetry, too, was a *Harper's* mainstay in the 20's, with verse coming from A. A. Milne, Carl Sandburg, and now almost forgotten versifiers such as Florence Keady and Morrie Ryskind. At the same time, *The Saturday Evening Post* was publishing Ring Lardner, Stephen Vincent Benét, Willa Cather, Theodore Dreiser, and Joseph Conrad. The literary standards were perhaps even higher at *Scribner's*, where editors Robert Bridges and Fritz Dashiell had the inside track with the Scribner's stable: F. Scott Fitzgerald, Sherwood Anderson, Ernest Hemingway, Erskine Caldwell, John Galsworthy, and Thomas Wolfe. *Scribner's* poetry came from such pens as Mark Van Doren, Edmund Wilson, and John Hall Wheelock.

By the 1920's, *The Atlantic Monthly* had become much less literary than it had been under Howells or under Bliss Perry (who left *The Atlantic* for Harvard in 1909), but it was still possible to find—amid the articles on "The Decline of Crime in Great Britain" or "Disarmament—An American Plan"—first-rate literary criticism on Samuel Johnson, Charles Dickens, Izaak Walton, or A. E. Housman. Poetry then offered by *The Atlantic* included that of Archibald MacLeish, Amy Lowell, and Sara Teasdale.

Also auguring well for the state of American literature was the appearance in 1924 of the *Saturday Review of Literature* under the editorship of Henry Seidel Canby, a professor of English at Yale. Originally started in 1920 as a supplement to the New York *Evening Post*, the *Saturday Review* attempted "an audacious shifting from the timely . . . to present aspects of the eternal" by surveying "the best in fiction, poetry, and the general fields." The effort fast won the support of such distinguished writers as Joseph Wood Krutch, George Santayana, and Van Wyck Brooks and poets such as Walter de la Mare, Conrad Aiken, and Marianne Moore. But this flowering of literary journalism did not last. It was a bad sign that when Harold W. Ross founded *The New Yorker*, his attempt to woo the flapper generation was only superficially literary, offering light verse (Ogden Nash), satire (James Thurber), and witty commentary on the manners, entertainments, morals, and fashions of the rich. As Eugene Exman, an editor at *Harper's*, put it, the new magazine was for "the modern reader"—"cynical of moral, religious, social, political, and economic standards" and in search of "new values."

It was, Exman explains in *The House of Harper*, because of the rise of these new attitudes among readers that Thomas B. Wells, editor of *Harper's*, had decided in 1925 that the magazine



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"could not long survive unless it extended its appeal beyond genteel literary-minded readers to those who were concerned about public affairs as well." Wells's decision to publish articles on "controversial issues," such as America's Far East policy or the "New Woman-Power in Europe," did work—circulation soon doubled. And while *Scribner's, Century, The Bookman,* and *Review of Reviews* all folded during the 1930's, *Harper's* survived—but not as a literary magazine. On the basis of "declining public interest," the editors stopped serializing all but the biggest names in fiction—Huxley, Greene, Maugham—during the 1950's, and in the 1960's explicitly acknowledged that "the trend of the *Magazine* is toward nonfiction." In the late 1960's, under the editorship of Willie Morris, fiction altogether disappeared from some issues of *Harper's* while many others had only a token piece by some notable such as Ayi Kwei-Armah or Ivan Prashker. Meanwhile, the magazine idolized George McGovern, "body consciousness," and Gore Vidal and anathematized Richard Nixon and nuclear power. The move toward the poetry of John Ashbery and Anne Sexton was just in time. If a final blow was needed, it came a year ago when *Harper's* adopted a new format described by the *New York Times* as "breezier" and "faster-paced." "We are less a magazine for the English teacher," explains editor Lewis Lapham. "There aren't enough of them and they don't make enough money." As George Panichas observed recently in *Modern Age,* "For readers who revere the critical function of intellectual journalism . . . the fate of *Harper's* is especially distressing as still another adulterative symptom and portent of breakdown."

The Saturday Evening Post similarly bent to the wind and abandoned its commitment to literature. By the early 1960's, as Otto Friedrich relates in *Decline and Fall,* the editors were busy fighting among themselves over what to say about Vietnam and whether to put Elizabeth Taylor on the cover (in those days some big advertisers actually thought Taylor was "immoral" and "didn't like to have their ads in the same issue with her"). Fiction became a useful accessory only when it fit an issue defined on non-literary terms (e.g., some "New York fiction" was thought appropriate for an issue on the New York World's Fair—with 11 pages of color pictures). But even Miss Taylor, in living color décolletage, couldn't forestall the inevitable: the magazine folded in 1969. Reincarnated in 1971, the *Post* is now edited by Cory SerVaas, wife of a leading businessman and community leader, and published in Indianapolis. The new version evinces a refreshingly pro-Christian slant, but is no longer in the publishing mainstream and is only marginally committed to literature: interviews with Crystal Gayle and Pat Robertson come first.

The Atlantic continued to offer some first-rate poetry through the 1950's, but—as with *Harper's*—the trend was toward articles on "The Balance of Military Power," "What Will India Eat Tomorrow?" and "Mob Justice and Television." In the late 60's and early 70's, *The New Yorker* lost the vestigial literariness of its graceful cynicism and became earnestly political, fervid in its attacks on Nixon and reverential in its praise for Robert Reich, the Berrigans, and other New Left icons. People continued to buy it largely on the strength of its ads and cartoons. The *Saturday Review of Literature* began turning away from literature after Norman Cousins became the editor in 1939. As explained in a 1957 anthology of the magazine's best work since its inception, Cousins' editorial policy was premised on the belief that "the Great Depression and the growing threat of World War II had intervened between 1939 and that earlier, perhaps happier day when purely literary matters had been clearly at the center of the responsible citizen's concern with the state of his civilization." Literature, the *SRL* editors believed, had been "pushed from the center to the periphery" and books were now "read less because one thinks of them as literature than for the sake of their immediate relevance to social or political or moral attitudes." And so, instead of bucking these trends, the magazine shortened its name to simply the *Saturday Review* and began replacing its articles on Gogol, Coleridge, and Camus with discussions of American-Soviet relations, passport policies, and Dewey's educational philosophy. The editorial strategy failed anyway. After a short venture in the early 70's as the *Saturday Review/World,* the magazine collapsed in 1982. Resurrected in 1983 under the editorship of Frank Gannon, the *Review* has left its literary past far behind. Attention to literature is now confined to a short book review section, while the magazine devotes its attention to the "aspects of the eternal" illuminated by Dick Cavett, Tom Selleck, and Kathleen Turner.

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Looking back over the flight of American journals from literature into politics, sociology, and pop culture, a contemporary reader may suppose—a la McLuhan—that the medium of large-scale journalism was never truly compatible with literary excellence and that the advent of television made storytelling in print no longer feasible anyway. It may also be argued that earth-shaking economic, political, and social events did make literature seem increasingly irrelevant. But a different and more fundamental perception was offered in a timely 1928 article in *The Atlantic Monthly* entitled "Why Literature Declines." The author, Robert Lynd, concludes: "Literature begins to go to the dogs as soon as Earth becomes restive and declares its independence of Heaven. In the great ages of literature, Earth was, if not a suburb of Heaven, a subject kingdom." If Lynd is correct, then, returning literature once again to a place of national prominence will take more than a few editorial meetings. It will require that large numbers of Americans again embrace a sounder metaphysics than that celebrated in *The New Yorker* or *The Atlantic.* (BJC) cc

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REVISIONS

Subversive Sanity

POW's in the concentration camps of the mind, our children suffer the vindictive vagaries of the Educationalist bureaucracy. Their teachers "are just following orders." The rest of us pin on our yellow ribbons and dream of a Scarlet Pimpernel or Rambo to rescue them. If I were Richard Crenna, I would parachute in Richard Mitchell, professor of English at Glassboro State College in New Jersey. Author, editor, printer, and assistant circulation manager of *The Underground Grammarian*, Mitchell has taken as his motto Emerson's injunction "to affront and reprimand the smooth mediocrity and squalid contentment of the times." In issue after issue of his irreverent periodical, he mocks, jeers, and mourns over what the educators are doing to our children and their teachers. He writes so well that when he pauses to quote the looney tunes and two-bit tyrants of our school systems, their maunderings grate on our ears like fingers drawn screeching across a blackboard. He writes so well that we may be very glad that Little, Brown has now published a collection of some of his best UG pieces: *The Leaning Tower of Babel and Other Affronts by the Underground Grammarian* (Boston). If you be among the few—brothers, be ye ne'er so vile—who delight in forceful but graceful English, buy Mitchell, take him home, and read him.

Read him out loud. His mockery of those who see the study of foreign languages as elitist or who seek a "basic minimal competency" is not soon quenched. His tragic picture of the illiterate high school principal who thought attacks on his lack of syntax and orthography were due, *must* be due, to racism is a masterpiece of passion and pathos. At one point, he lectures a Cuban *émigré*, one Perez, now city commissioner in Miami, because Perez wanted to stop Martin Bregman from producing *Scarface*, not because the movie was to be bloody and violent, but because the movie might "reflect badly" on Cuba's cultural heritage. Mitchell reminds the city commissioner that he is now part of our culture and must learn to understand the rights and duties (when was the last time you saw those two words conjoined?) of our Anglo-Saxon, Protestant civilization. "For the day will come, through sheer force of numbers combined with the corrosive labors of our sycophantic educationalists, when *your* cultural heritage may outweigh ours. In that happy day, *your* dreams will be fulfilled. . . . Movie-makers will obey city commissioners. And in that day, Perez, to what new land will your children flee?" Or read his few pages on Joanne Greenberg, author [sic] of a *Jack and the Beanstalk* in which "one major change has been made: the Giant is not killed in the end, to avoid a violent act which would have no bearing on the issues being examined."

Mitchell does have a thing about Christianity. Often he is on target, as in his mockery of the Reverend Mr. Rex Heath, who complained that "all those schools like Yale and Harvard started out as Christian schools, but then they got concerned with quality." But often he is wrongheaded. Sometimes this results not merely in unwonted carelessness (attributing a quote from the Epistle of James to Paul, for instance) but to serious distortions. For instance, Mitchell portrays Martin Luther as being anti-education because he once called Reason "the Devil's whore." Luther was objecting not to public education but to a rationalistic reductionism that was trying to remove the mystery of the Real Presence from the Sacrament of the Altar. Luther wrote pamphlets and sermons on the need for excellence in education, of which the most famous is his 1524 appeal to "the City Commissioners (*Ratsherrn*) of the cities of the German land, that they ought to start up and maintain Christian schools." It is a bad sign that those as literate and witty as Richard Mitchell have now forgotten how Christian faith once informed the highest educational standards. Even when he is wrong, however, Mitchell is more fun to read than the entire *New York Times* best-seller list. Read him. (*E. Christian Kopff*) cc

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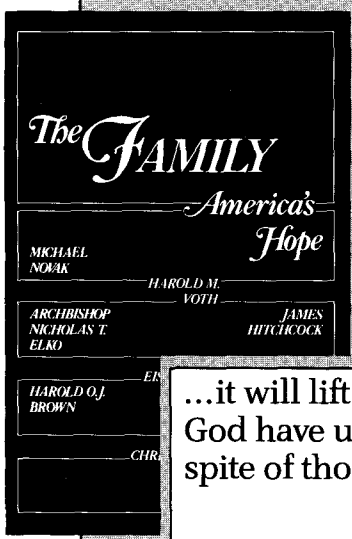

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